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HEROES AND MARTYRS OF FAITH

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# HEROES AND MARTYRS OF FAITH<sup>0</sup>

BY PROF.  
A. S. PEAKE, D.D.

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TO MY BROTHER  
GEORGE NEWTON PEAKE  
I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME  
WITH LOYAL AFFECTION



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## P R E F A C E

THE present volume contains a devotional and practical study of the insight and triumphs of faith as depicted in the roll-call of illustrious exemplars in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The critical and historical problems which the Old Testament narratives present to the modern reader were not on the author's horizon, and are therefore left aside as irrelevant. For the exegetical basis of the exposition the commentary on the Epistle in the Century Bible may be consulted.



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## CHAPTER I

### THE DEFINITION OF FAITH

THERE are few passages in the Bible to which we turn more eagerly than to the great chapter on faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews. We are enthralled by its noble and stately eloquence and inspired by the sacred memories so vividly recalled to us. We have passed through the abstract and complex argument by which the author has sought to prove the finality of the Christian religion. The elaborate and many-sided contrast which he institutes between it and Judaism has, it may be, strained our attention and fatigued our interest. If our cast of mind is not theological, we may perhaps have found the discussion dry and arid, its method and its problem alike remote from everyday life. What concern of ours, we are tempted impatiently to ask, is all this laboured exposition of the deficiencies of

Jewish ritual, this demonstration of its incapacity to satisfy our deepest needs? We are far in advance of readers to whom it came as a startling novelty that it was a sheer impossibility for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. With the imperfections of the tabernacle, its priesthood and its sacrifices, we are not concerned. The truth the author sought to force on unwilling ears is to us the merest commonplace. For my own part, I do not of course sympathise with such impatience, assured as I am how much even this generation might learn from discussions so cavalierly dismissed.

But even those who have toiled through the argumentative section with uncomprehending weariness will speak with enthusiasm of this chapter on faith. They turn the page and the dreary waste of argument seems to lie behind them, and they have emerged into the enchanted land. Sentence by sentence the swift and skilful pen calls up before them the old familiar stories of Hebrew history, and they realise that the writer is no mere dry-as-dust controversialist or theological pedant, but a man whose blood is still stirred by romance,

who responds with a leap of the spirit to deeds of heroism. The author, they would say, has forgotten his theology and has come back to the realities of life.

Yet this would be but a half-instructed judgment. We cannot fail to be fascinated by the stories which he flashes before our mental vision, so long at least as deeds of lofty daring or endurance have power to thrill our souls. But the author is very far from having forgotten the main theme of his letter or the reason which prompted him to write it. This chapter is built into his argument, and could not be withdrawn without leaving a serious logical flaw. Of course it is also an impassioned and impressive appeal, without which the practical value of the Epistle would be terribly impoverished. I do not wish to repeat here a discussion of the questions I have already investigated in my Commentary on this Epistle. I assume the critical, historical, and exegetical results reached in that volume. But it will be well by a brief restatement to place the reader at the right point of view, referring to what I have written elsewhere for the grounds on which my conclusions are based.

The Epistle to the Hebrews was probably written to a house-church in Rome by one of its own members who was absent from it. The Church had a comparatively long and honourable history behind it. Its members had faced persecution and remained loyal to their faith ; but in spite of their heroic past, and much that was commendable in their present condition, they were menaced by grave dangers. There was an element of stagnation, a refusal to make progress, an indolent and timid conservatism of thought, an obstinate attachment to the obsolete and antiquated which the author regarded as ominous.

There was another and even more serious peril. This was that they should abandon Christianity altogether. The precise form which this danger took is a matter of dispute. Several scholars think that the Church addressed was composed of Gentiles. I find it very difficult to believe that the readers were either Gentiles or proselytes to Judaism. The older theory, that they were Jews by race who had been Jews by religion and had become Christians, seems to me still much the most probable view. Nor do I believe that

those are right who consider that the peril from which the author would save them is that of a lapse or relapse into paganism, or complete indifference to religion altogether. It is rather apostasy to Judaism, a return to what Paul called the beggarly elements, which entices them. On any other supposition the author has conducted his argument in an unskilful and largely irrelevant way.

The stress of argument in the Epistle is directed to establishing the position that all which they fondly imagined they could find in Judaism, but which Judaism really could not give them, was to be found in a perfect and final form in Christianity. And this is established by a very elaborate contrast between the two religions, based on the philosophical conception of the two ages which the author has derived from Alexandrian thought. Judaism belongs to this material world, and its physical character marks it out for dissolution; whereas Christianity belongs to the eternal immaterial order, and can therefore be overtaken by no decay. A fuller comprehension of what this contrast means will be gained as we consider the

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place which faith occupies in the author's scheme.

With this contrast, accordingly, the author calls away the attention of his readers from the sensuous ritual which threatened to enslave them, and bids them rise from the physical and the material into that pure region of eternity where the spirit finds its congenial home. Nearly the whole of his argument is a development and detailed application of this fundamental thought, and, however remote it may appear from our own speculative problems and the demands of practical life, it is a mistake to imagine that the Epistle deals simply with dead issues. On the contrary, it is in some respects one of the most modern of all the New Testament writings, in spite of the alien garb in which it comes to us.

Now, it cannot have escaped the attention of so skilful a pleader that there was an obvious criticism which could be urged against his argument. A reader who had followed his demonstration with care and attention, and who might have been impressed by the cogency of his reasoning, could, nevertheless, say to him with some show of justice that,

after all, his demonstration might be reasonably taken to prove that though Christianity was the heavenly religion, Judaism was better fitted for us while upon earth. The physical qualities of the latter might stamp it as transitory, but a full recognition that it was superseded in heaven might be compatible with the view that it ought to be maintained on earth.

Why, it might be said, should we expect in so imperfect a world to have a perfect religion? and why should we who are not spirit only, but body as well, reject a religion on the ground of its physical character? We are creatures of this age, inhabitants of this world. While we remain so, is it not more fitting that we should practise the religion of the present age, not that of the world to come? Are we Christians, it might fairly be asked, any better off in the point of spiritual privilege than the Jews? Christianity for the world to come, but Judaism for this world!

Such an argument had much to reinforce it. Judaism was, for one thing, an old religion, throwing its roots far back in history.

The glamour of a hoary antiquity was about it, and in the ancient world this meant much more than it would mean to ourselves with our restless love of novelty and our chafing against the rule of long-established tradition. Moreover, it had enlisted the enthusiastic loyalty of its own adherents, to whom the readers were bound by ties of blood. And what great and inspiring memories gathered about it! How sensitive the author himself was to them is clear from this chapter on faith. And the magic of these forces drew the readers back to the old religion, which, if less spiritual, was at any rate more tangible and familiar, and conceded more to human weakness.

To counteract these tendencies, the writer recalls them to their own experience. It was not as if their religion had yielded them no satisfaction. They had found a real joy and spiritual satisfaction in it which had enabled them to stand firm in the hour of persecution, not with gloomy determination, but with an exulting joy. Their experience of the Gospel should guarantee their loyalty. It was not true to that experience that they were better



off with Judaism than with the Gospel. But he also, by a daring stroke, invokes the memories which the Jews cherished, in order to encourage his readers not to revert to Judaism, but to remain faithful to Christianity. The author is not deterred from doing so by the obvious criticism that if Judaism could achieve so much as in this chapter he asserts, it could hardly be described as a spent force, or religiously so incapable as his previous argument has represented it. He appeals to the heroes of the Old Covenant that he may foster his readers' loyalty to the New. But this chapter is not written solely for this purpose. The speculative difficulty I have mentioned receives its solution in the author's conception of faith, and the lines along which he develops it must now engage our attention.

We shall place ourselves better at the author's point of view if we consider our own experience. Throughout our life there is an unending stream of impressions thronging upon us along every avenue of our senses. They report to us the existence of an external universe, and nothing seems so real to us as

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this solid, tangible world. Yet there are faculties and aspirations within us which do not find their satisfaction in it, there are forces which play upon us whose origin we cannot trace to a material source. And these, we come to feel, are the elements in life which matter most, those that bring to us our highest and purest joys, and those to which we can cling with least dread of disappointment. For so far as the realm of nature goes there is nothing more characteristic of it than its lack of stability. "All things are in constant flux," was the saying of an ancient philosopher, and our own experience speedily convinces us of its truth. Decay and death are forces which are at work everywhere, and even the most obstinate material substances cannot permanently resist their action. Since we demand something to whose permanence we can cling with confidence, on which we can rest amid the shock of change and the crash of worlds, we cannot remain content with the world of sense. But behind the veil which limits our physical perceptions, and which they may not penetrate, there exists the realm of eternal realities.

It is of this which the author speaks in the first verse of this chapter as certified to us by faith. I translate the verse, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." The latter part of the sentence deals with the existence of an unseen world, the former part presents it to us as an object of our hope. And the power which brings us this conviction that the unseen world is a reality, and that it contains the satisfaction of our hopes, is faith. We might escape the deadening effect of familiarity if we changed the term and spoke of spiritual insight. It is spiritual insight which is not blinded by illusion, but pierces through appearances to the underlying reality. It is in virtue of this faculty that we defy the bounds of time and space and reach the spiritual core through its material envelope. Perhaps we ought to adopt Dr. Moulton's suggestion and give to the word translated "assurance" the more specific sense "title-deeds," which has been discovered in the papyri. The thought thus acquires an added concrete and picturesque character.

The question may arise, then, what is the

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difference between faith and hope? Both look forward to the future, to the unseen world that lies beyond the veil, which we can enter only when death tears the veil asunder and launches the unfettered spirit into the spiritual world. Yet there is a difference which I may explain in words I have used elsewhere. "While we are strangers and pilgrims we are not actually inhabitants of the New Jerusalem. But faith has this quality—that it can lift us into fellowship with the Unseen, that it can carry us within the veil. And so, while we are still inhabitants of this world, we may at any moment through faith draw nigh and enter into the world to come. Faith has thus a power of realisation, by which the invisible becomes visible and the future becomes present. While hope is the confident anticipation of a future regarded as future, faith appropriates that future as an experience of the present."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the author solves the speculative difficulty to which I have drawn attention, and assures us that we need not criticise Christianity on the ground that it does not

<sup>1</sup> *Hebrews* in *The Century Bible*, p. 210.

match and respond to our earthly conditions. It will, of course, be clear that we must carefully distinguish the use of the term in this Epistle from the characteristic use of Paul. Paul also employs it in a similar sense, but in his most characteristic use of it he stands somewhat alone. In consequence, however, of the enormous influence which his writings have had on our thought and expression, his use of "faith" to designate the act of trust in virtue of which the sinner is justified has become so prominent that we need to be on our guard against reading it into passages in which it is employed in an entirely different sense. Accordingly, throughout our study of this chapter we must bear in mind quite definitely the sense which the author attached to the word.

He links it closely with a famous passage in Habakkuk. The prophet was tortured by a problem which was to play a very large part in the later Jewish literature. It is the oppression of his righteous people by the heathen tyrant which creates his difficulty. Why is it that the righteous God suffers His own people to be trampled under foot

and permits the brutal pagan to lead his hosts from victory to victory, to spill the blood of the saints and enrich himself with their spoil? The answer that the prophet is able to reach is religious and not speculative. His soul returns to its rest not because he can explain the mysteries of God's ways, but because he trusts in God Himself. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" is the truth on which he feels that he may stand. He leaves his problem unanswered, and draws his comfort from the thought that the tyranny of the oppressor will soon come to an end. And therefore he bids the righteous take courage, heartening him with the assurance "My just one shall live by his faithfulness," by which he means that if Israel will not be impatient but really cleave to her God, unshaken in her allegiance by His apparent abandonment of her, her fidelity will receive its reward, and while the oppressor is hurled headlong to ruin, she will live and be prosperous.

It is an interesting example of the freedom with which the New Testament writers use the Old Testament, their emancipation from superstition and nervous dread, which we have

in the use of this passage from Habakkuk in Paul and the Epistle to the Hebrews. Paul quotes the old words with an entirely new meaning. He thinks not of the nation but of the individual, not of faithfulness but of faith, and that in his own specific sense. Moreover, he connects the words differently. He uses the words to enshrine his great doctrine of justification by faith, and we best translate his words, "he that is righteous by faith shall live," or, as more easily expressed, "he shall live who is justified by faith." The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, although he follows the Septuagint, which diverges from the Hebrew, yet remains more closely by the sense of Habakkuk. He also encourages his readers to withstand the temptation to waver in their loyalty by the assurance that the triumph which they are so impatiently awaiting will shortly come. To draw back will be to invite the displeasure of God, to hold on will secure the salvation of their souls. And though we can catch the undertone of misgiving, he expresses the confidence that his readers will prove themselves to be among those who do not draw back, but have faith



to the salvation of their souls. Thus, as is his wont, his great argument goes forward, subserving its double purpose not simply of vindicating Christianity as superior to Judaism, but of raising the drooping hands and bracing the palsied knees. And he skilfully takes the line which will enlist the sympathy of his readers. There is no patriot who is not keenly sensitive to the history of his own country, and the Jews were pre-eminently a nation of patriots who gloried in the proud memories of the past and were stung to madness by the disgrace of the present.

I am often struck by the skill with which Stephen conducted his defence before his implacable enemies. A reasoned argument for the truth of Christianity, such as might have been fitting before an impartial tribunal, would have been useless when addressed to judges such as his. I expect that many are considerably puzzled by what seems to them the irrelevance of his discourse. Why should he spend all this time recounting the familiar history of his people, which seems to have so little bearing on the question at stake? The first reason is that this was his best way of



getting a hearing. He was simply recounting incidents as to which he and his judges were at one. There was no dispute between them as to the correctness of what he was saying, and no line could have been adopted by him more calculated to conciliate his opponents. His method had also this incidental advantage, that it made clear his own real adhesion to the Old Testament. However revolutionary his religion might be, it left the Old Testament untouched. But if he had simply constructed a defence which had only these recommendations, he might as well have been silent. It was indispensable to gain a hearing, but the advantage would have counted for nothing had he said nothing to the point.

But when we look closely at the speech, we are surprised to see with what consummate ability it has been planned. He had been accused of attacking the unique sanctity of the temple and the permanence of the Mosaic dispensation. In his reply he selects his incidents to break the force of the accusation. Two strains are twined together in his speech. The former and the more important is, that some of God's greatest revelations to His

people had been given outside the Holy Land. His attack accordingly on the unique religious position assigned to the temple had the warrant of the Old Testament itself. Moreover, he brings out at various points the rebellious character of the Israelites and their unwillingness to accept the messengers whom God had sent them. And thus he prepares for the conclusion that their present attitude towards Jesus is only of a piece with the rebellion of their fathers. Having thus virtually demonstrated his case, such defence as can be offered before that tribunal is complete. Accordingly, all that remains is to unmask his batteries and pour in his fire.

A similar skill is shown by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is true that he is writing to friends, and that they will listen respectfully to what he has to say. But just as in earlier parts of the Epistle, so here his tactics are of a very conciliatory kind. He seeks for a point of contact with his readers, and tries to make them feel that what is most precious to them really supports the position to which he desires to bring them. "I sympathise," he would say,

“with all your enthusiasm for the great heroes of our race, but you will best follow their example, not by falling back to the religious stage which they occupied, but by loyal adherence to Jesus, the supreme Person of history.”

## CHAPTER II

### FAITH IN GOD AS CREATOR

AFTER his definition of faith, the writer tells us that in virtue of this quality the elders had witness borne to them. By the elders he means the saints of the Old Covenant. The verse fulfils the function of a kind of text which is expounded in the rest of the chapter. I do not, however, linger on it now, since the thought recurs at the close of the chapter, and may be best treated then. Before he launches, however, on the main stream of illustration, he pauses for a moment to touch on faith as exhibited in the recognition of God's creative activity. "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which do appear." Strictly speaking, the term translated "worlds" means "ages," but as used here it includes the

material universe. Here, then, an issue is raised which, in our day, is a very living one. While the Psalmist could say, "The heavens declare the glory of God," there are voices which tell us to-day that they declare the glory of Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton. In other words, while the devout mind sees in the wonderful spectacle of the starry heavens the wisdom and power of God, the unbeliever, for whom there is no personal God at all, thinks the greatest triumph in connexion with the heavens is that of the human mind which has penetrated the mysteries of the stellar universe. On which side, then, are we to take our stand? Are we to echo our author's words, or ally ourselves with those who explain the universe not as a creation of mind, but the product of unconscious material forces?

One difficulty which the passage suggests may be dismissed at the outset. It is probable that very many modern readers imagine that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews expresses here a belief in the creation of the world out of nothing, and that this doctrine is also taught by the first chapter of Genesis.

But the strict meaning of the Hebrew term rendered "create" in that chapter is unknown. The root meaning of the word is probably "to cut," or "to carve," and in that case it would suit better the conception of formation out of pre-existing material. And similarly the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews does not raise the question whether pre-existent material was or was not employed by God. What he denies is that creation had its source in the phenomenal. It was made out of things which do not appear.

Here again his fundamental thought—that the immaterial universe is the eternal reality, of which the material is only the shadow—receives expression. But it is no concern of his to assert creation out of nothing, or to express any opinion upon the subject. Theologians may feel that their construction of doctrine demands it, but with this we are not concerned. I wish simply to insist that we must not commit the Biblical writers to this position. We have suffered so much in the past from the illegitimate claims which have been made, not simply for the Biblical statements themselves, but for the degree to

which the Bible endorses the speculations of theology, that it is desirable to lay emphasis on its silence touching this issue. The question itself is one of such difficulty and complexity that a cautious student would naturally maintain an attitude of reserve. At present we are very far from understanding the ultimate conception of matter. Very much has been done in the last few years to revolutionise earlier ideas, and we have, no doubt, still very much to learn. Whether we shall ever penetrate to the heart of the mystery is questionable, since each fresh answer seems to succeed only in throwing the problem a stage further back. The relation in which matter stands to spirit is one on which at present we have no light. Nor is it necessary for faith that we should have any. There are those who find that the idea of absolute creation is an intellectual impossibility to them. I would point out to them that the Biblical doctrine of creation imposes no such tax upon them, since between this and rival theories it does not decide.

Quite definitely, however, the Bible and our Christian faith assert the creation of the

universe by God. In other words, whatever be our attitude on the philosophical or scientific issues involved, it is our belief as Christians that the universe was brought into being by the power of God. The view has its difficulties. Many of the ancient Gnostics were so impressed by the imperfections of the world that they drew a sharp distinction between the supreme God and the Creator, whose blunders had to be repaired so far as that was possible. Faith, however, finds just its opportunity in the obstacles that are thrown in its way. And just here modern science has come greatly to the help of theism. There are many things in the world difficult to harmonise with the Christian conception of God so long as we occupy the position that special creation was the method of His work. But from the modern point of view these difficulties largely disappear. They cease to be difficulties when development rather than special creation is conceived to be the plan which God has followed.

The Gnostics also based an objection to the identification of the Creator with the supreme God on their view that matter was



inherently evil. It seemed impossible to them that a perfect being should come in contact with it. Hence a whole series of links had to be interposed between Himself and matter, or it had to be regarded as a wholly independent substance. In either case the manipulation of it to form the present world was abandoned to a inferior, if not to an evil, power. Fortunately the main stream of Christian opinion followed a different course, in spite of certain unhealthy tendencies, especially of an ascetic character, which savoured too much of Gnosticism.

Where the Incarnation is heartily believed in, there the intrinsic evil of matter cannot logically be affirmed, and the Gnostic theory was quickly seen to be inconsistent with a hearty belief that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. It reduced to unreality the birth, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ. Hence, in spite of its pretensions to a loftier spirituality, in spite of the extraordinary success which for a time it attained, it was doomed to early and swift extinction. The Christian believes in a God who does not shrink from contact with

matter, but who at every moment of time, and at every point of space in the vast universe, fills and sustains the whole of it with His unsleeping energy. It would greatly impoverish our religion were we to withdraw the physical universe from His domain, and limit Him to the spiritual. It would be a disastrous blunder to distinguish between the God of Nature and the God of grace.

It is very significant that the New Testament writers throw such stress on the relation which the Son of God sustains to the physical world. Paul and John and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews alike insist upon it. The two latter place it in the very forefront of the argument. They will not hear of any rivals, whether angelic or other orders of being, to whom the work of creation may be assigned. With this truth Paul meets the spurious spirituality of the false teachers at Colossae. On this supremacy in the realm of nature, he and his fellows build their exposition of His work in redemption.

Behind the Christian presentation there lies the great Hebrew doctrine of creation which we find in prophet and poet and

historian, notably in the Second Isaiah, in the Book of Job, and in the opening chapters of Genesis. And of this in particular we may say that it was the achievement of faith, for the Hebrew was not versed in physical science or philosophical speculation. In Greece it was different, and of course it might be urged that in this respect the Hebrews were dependent upon Babylonia. But there is a very marked difference between the gross polytheistic story of creation which we find current in Babylonia and the pure monotheistic doctrine, from which the pagan elements have been eliminated, that we find in the Old Testament.

There is one point in particular in which the first chapter of Genesis has the advantage. The author here recalls it to us when he says that the universe was formed by the word of God. In this phrase the author reminds us of the eight-fold formula in the first chapter of Genesis, "And God said." By this effortless word God called the various orders of creation into existence and carried to completion His stupendous task. Here there is no conflict with the hostile demon

of darkness and chaos as in the Babylonian myth, no struggle to bend the reluctant matter to His will, no laborious shaping and moulding of raw stuff into the finished product, but the mere utterance of the word achieves at once and perfectly the divine intention. For the word of God is, as this author himself has told us, instinct with a divine power. It is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and being what it is, it cannot when once it has been spoken return to Him void. The energy that throbs within it brings about its fulfilment and carries to its completion the task on which He has sent it. And therefore by faith we believe in God as the Creator who makes matter plastic to His will, and out of things which do not appear has called into being this world that we know.

It is also by faith that, in spite of all the appearances to the contrary, we hold fast our belief that the world is not abandoned by Him, but remains the sphere wherein He still acts. Not indeed always with the effortless word, for in the things of the spirit He is limited by the attitude of His creatures

whom He has endowed with a measure of independence and free will. And therefore while in the realm of matter His will moves triumphantly and directly to its end, in the realm of spirit it is often only through thwarting and disappointment, by unchosen and unwelcome ways, that He attains His goal. And the Christian watches the vexatious disappointment and agonising delay, and is tempted to despair. But it is the victory of faith that he believes in God, not simply as the Creator of the universe, but as its ever-active Lord who will, in spite of all suspense and postponement, at last bring all opposition to an end and reign as the unchallenged King of kings.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FAITH OF ABEL

THE author of the Epistle to the Hebrews begins the series of examples, by which he illustrates his conception of faith, with the case of Abel. There are various difficulties raised by the passage into which I need not enter, since I have discussed them elsewhere. Nor do I deal with the problems which the narrative of Genesis presents, since I am concerned not so much with it as with the view taken of it by the author. It is not clear in what he considered the superiority of Abel's sacrifice to lie, but probably it was for him less a question of quantity than of quality. In other words, while his language might well be interpreted to mean that Abel presented a more lavish sacrifice than the niggardly offering of Cain, it is perhaps rather more likely that he laid the stress on the fact that

it was an animal and not a vegetable offering. The sacrificial efficacy of blood is prominent in his thought, and it is quite natural that the distinction in the material of the offerings should seem to give the clue to the acceptance of one and the rejection of the other.

Since the regulations as to sacrifice were issued at a later period, and there is no hint in Genesis that any ritual directions had at that time been revealed, the fact that Abel offered a blood sacrifice may well have seemed to the author very significant. We may with confidence infer that the author believed that no such directions had been given, from the fact that Cain brought a vegetable offering. He had faith in the existence of God, and would not have presented a sacrifice which had been explicitly forbidden. But he had not that degree of spiritual insight which Abel possessed. The faith of the latter is displayed in this, that although he had no intimation of the type of sacrifice which would be well-pleasing to God, he was so gifted with spiritual perception that he selected an animal victim, while Cain brought the fruits of the field.

It is quite true, of course, that elsewhere

the author very emphatically criticises the value of animal victims. At the same time they had a relative worth. Their blood sanctified unto the cleanness of the flesh—that is, it removed the ceremonial impurity which unfitted a man to approach God in the service of the sanctuary, although its virtue could not strike below the surface and cleanse the conscience from the sense of guilt. Moreover, it cleansed the tabernacle and its furniture so that they might be fitted for the uses to which they were designed. Again, although the offering of the blood of bulls and goats was a mere copy of what took place in the heavenly temple, it was at least a copy. It corresponded to and reflected the reality, and thus pointed in the direction of the truth.

Once more, while the death of the animal and the manipulation of its blood could not liberate man's conscience from the burden of his guilt or restore to him communion with God, it brought home to him the fact of guilt and the problem of reconciliation. It thus prepared the way for the supreme sacrifice of Christ by which the problem received its adequate and final solution. And its very



inadequacy was itself an unconscious prophecy, for the tormenting sense of alienation from God which it expressed was itself a prediction that God would ultimately deal with the question in a radical way. The constant reminder which men received of their sins and their helplessness in dealing with them deepened the sense of sin and quickened the longing for an adequate redemption. It would not therefore be contrary to the general drift of the writer's argument to consider that he detected in Abel's selection of an animal victim the outcome of his faith.

This faith did not go without divine recognition. The word of God bore witness to him. We read, "And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering." The writer apparently understood this to mean that Abel's sacrifice secured the approval of God because it exhibited the quality of faith. This is suggested by what he says in connexion with the next example, that without faith it is impossible to be pleasing unto Him. The problems which this raises were, perhaps, not before the writer's mind, though they can hardly fail to strike ourselves. At present, however, it is

our task to look at things from his point of view. That witness was borne to those who had faith is a thought which has been already expressed in the words, "By it the elders received a good report," and much the same is said with reference to Enoch. The thought is one, however, to which it will be necessary to refer more fully, and therefore I pass it by for the present.

The author proceeds to tell us that through the faith he thus manifested he still speaks to us. In order to understand this we must bear in mind the writer's doctrine of Scripture. Scripture is for him the living and active word of God, so that its utterances belong not simply to the past but to the present. And therefore, although from the point of view of the historian the speech of Abel might seem to belong to the past, to the author it belongs to the present in virtue of its record on the page of Scripture. The voice of Abel is the voice of his blood which called to God from the ground. It is a thought for which we have many parallels that blood spilt upon the earth cries for vengeance. We find it in Job's passionate appeal to the earth not to cover his

blood and thus stifle his cry, and in Ezekiel's reference to the blood of Jerusalem which had been set on the bare rock by God that it should not be covered and thus go unredressed.

Thus since God spoke of Abel's blood as crying to Him from the ground, the author thinks of it as still uttering its appeal. He alludes to it once again in the Epistle. Contrasting our favoured position with that of those under the Old Covenant, he refers to the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better than that of Abel. The contrast is a very striking one. The blood of Abel invoked vengeance on his murderer, the blood of Jesus effects our reconciliation. The punishment which in consequence came upon Cain was that he should be banished from the habitable land and forced to live in the desert where he would be a fugitive and a wanderer on the face of the earth, pursued by the vengeful spectres and haunted by the memory of his brother's face. But, on the contrary, the blood of Jesus stills the uneasy conscience, and steals from it the sense of its guilt. And while Cain moaned that he should be hid from the presence of God, the blood of Jesus has dedicated the new and the living

way by which we who heretofore could not enter God's presence are bidden to draw nigh. Thus here, again, in spite of his exhibition of the virtues of faith in the saints of the Old Covenant, the author will not suffer us to forget that they stand in marked contrast to the Supreme Example of life. For Cain there was the destiny of a homeless wanderer, but we have already come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God.

To ourselves no doubt the words of the author convey more naturally the impression that even though he is dead, Abel still speaks to us by his example. And though this does not quite hit his meaning, the thought itself is one which ought not to be forgotten. Shakespeare put into the mouth of the sophistical Anthony the words :

The evil that men do lives after them,  
The good is oft interred with their bones.

Happily that is not the case. While it is true that evil things and evil memory are a baleful legacy left by the wicked, yet it is also true that the memory of the just is an inspiration and their deeds are still potent for good after

they have been taken from us. And thus the memory of those who, in the dim twilight of revelation, were faithful to the light they received and prepared for the coming of the dawn, has still its message for us whose lot is cast in a happier time and on whom the ends of the ages have come.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ESCAPE FROM DEATH

FROM the case of Abel the author passes on to that of Enoch, and he fixes naturally upon his translation as the most striking fact connected with him. He was at a certain disadvantage in his reading of the Old Testament as compared with ourselves, because he was dependent on the Septuagint, and could not go behind it to the Hebrew text. Thus in place of the striking Hebrew phrase, "Enoch walked with God," the author read in the Septuagint, "Enoch was well-pleasing to God," a much more colourless expression. He finds in the fact that he was well-pleasing to God a demonstration of Enoch's faith, for had he been without this quality God could not have taken pleasure in him. Naturally no one would think of coming to God if he did not believe in His existence, or if he felt that He

was utterly indifferent to those who sought after Him, so that the writer infers the faith of Enoch from the fact that he pleased God. But we may be sure that he would have welcomed the information that the Hebrew represented Enoch as walking with God, for this would have been even more relevant to his purpose. On that account, although in this volume I keep for the most part to the standpoint of the Epistle, I may be forgiven if I work in here the material from Genesis.

The writer does not tell us how it came to pass that Enoch was singled out for such distinction. To be well-pleasing to God, to believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him, constitutes an achievement of faith attained by countless multitudes beside himself. And they, too, have the testimony borne to them that they please God, and yet they do not escape from death. It might, of course, be urged that Enoch's lot was cast in a time when righteousness was difficult, and the world was utterly corrupt. But, even if this be true, his goodness, though displayed under diffi-

cult circumstances, was not unique in this respect.

Although the author gives us no explicit help in solving the problem why the treatment of Enoch was so exceptional, we can perhaps detect to some extent the link that was in his mind between the faith of Enoch and his translation. Faith, I have said, is a conviction of the unseen realities. In the next place, it is a stronger power than hope, since it makes the future present. Even before the veil is removed, it, so to speak, abrogates it. It carries us in spirit within the veil, and makes us even now participate in the joys of the world to come. Then as the wings of faith grow more feeble, our strong flight draws to its close, and we find ourselves back again on the earthward side of the veil.

Perhaps, however, it might be possible, the writer may have thought, for that faith which gives us this transient experience of heaven to secure a permanent triumph. Thus a man whose faith was of unusual intensity might escape to the unseen realm without passing through death, and find in it his abiding home. The thought may seem fanciful, but it may



be along these lines that we ought to look for our solution. The statement that he walked with God helps us rather more. It testifies to the close, unbroken intercourse between God and His servant which death could not destroy. The thought that faith conquers death comes out elsewhere in the chapter. Yet we are told of others, to whom this exceptional privilege was not vouchsafed, that they walked with God. I have accordingly no complete explanation to offer of the unique experience through which Enoch is said to have passed.

It was not unnatural that the words "Enoch walked with God" should have led to the belief that God took him into His confidence, and revealed to him many mysteries. These mysteries, which touched the constitution of the universe, the fate of the wicked, the world's future history, were enshrined in an elaborate literature which began to grow up about him in the second century before our era. Quotation is made from it in Jude, but not elsewhere in the New Testament. It is possible that the original text of 1 Peter contained a reference to an experience of the

patriarch. Some scholars have suggested that the preaching to the spirits in prison was really a preaching by Enoch to the angels imprisoned on account of the transgression recorded in the sixth of Genesis, and Dr. Rendel Harris has recently championed this view with great vigour.

The correction of the text involved is quite easy, and its acceptance would remove a really serious difficulty. My main reason for hesitating to accept it is that in the following chapter we have the statement that the Gospel was preached to the dead. I find it hard to believe that the two passages refer to entirely different events. But it is obvious that the latter has no reference to Enoch's preaching to the imprisoned angels, for this was a preaching of condemnation, and they could not be described as "the dead." Accordingly I think we must allow the passage in Jude to stand by itself in the New Testament. At the same time it is hardly likely that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews can have been ignorant of this literature. Dr. Charles, in fact, thinks that our passage must depend in some way upon the Book of Enoch,

though this view does not rest on very strong grounds. But whether this be so or not, it is, at any rate, noteworthy that the author makes no allusion to Enoch's initiation into the secrets of God. He lays the stress on conduct rather than on knowledge. His silence reminds us that in our study of Scripture we should direct our attention not only to what it says but to what it does not say.

When we consider the story of Enoch's escape from death and try to draw a practical lesson from it for ourselves, we must remember how different our attitude towards death is from that current among the Hebrews. The view which dominated their attitude throughout almost the whole of the Old Testament was of a very gloomy character. For them death was no mere incident, still less a granting of fuller light and more intimate fellowship with God. The dark and hopeless night closed in even after the happiest and the longest day and put a period to man's communion with God. The later Old Testament writings disclose to us the gradual lifting of the shadow and relief

from the horror coming along various lines. The deepest thought which the saints of the Old Covenant achieved grew directly out of their religious experience. Their immediate sense of the love and the grace of God was so strong that their faith rose to the great conviction that this love was stronger than death.

Thus they could have anticipated Paul's ringing declaration that not death itself can separate us from the love of God. But Paul could add "in Christ Jesus our Lord," and thus give the weakest Christian a confidence which may have been a comparatively rare experience among the saints of the Old Covenant. In creating this loftier Jewish doctrine I think that the story of Enoch had its part to play. In the forty-ninth Psalm the words "For He will take me" are, I believe, a direct allusion to the words "God took him" in Genesis.

We may well imagine that the fear of death had weighed heavily upon the author before he became a Christian. We can detect the echo of his earlier dread in his reference to the fact that Christ had delivered "all

those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." In the enthusiasm of that new and exulting experience the attitude of many modern Christians towards death would have seemed inexplicable to him.

I do not linger over this at present, but Bunyan's treatment of the subject in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is remarkably instructive. I am especially impressed with the contrast between the closing scenes of the first part and the second part. While Christian's passage through the river was an experience of darkness and horror and despair, changing at last into triumph, in the second part even the weakest go through victoriously. For example, Much-afraid accompanied her father, Mr. Despondency, and Bunyan hits off her departure in the words, "His daughter went through the river singing, but none could understand what she said." The reader should also compare Mr. Greatheart's account of Mr. Fearing.

I do not know to what extent *The Pilgrim's Progress* is read at the present time, but I never return to it without wonder at the

genius and insight which it displays. I should be delighted to quote the whole of these wonderful closing scenes, but those who are familiar with them will be grateful to me for two paragraphs which I quote, especially for the last sentence, with its very direct bearing on the value and power of faith in the last crisis, and because of their reference to the subject of this chapter.

“Now I further saw, that betwixt them and the Gate was a river, and there was no Bridge to go over; the River was very deep; at the sight therefore of this River the Pilgrims were much stunned, but the men that went with them, said, you must go through, or you cannot come at the Gate.

“The Pilgrims then began to enquire if there was no other way to the Gate; to which they answered Yes, but there hath not any save two, to wit, *Enoch* and *Elijah*, been permitted to tread that path, since the foundation of the world, nor shall, until the last Trumpet shall sound. The Pilgrims then, especially *Christian*, began to despond in his mind, and looked this way and that, but no way could be found by them, by which they

might escape the river. Then they asked the men if the waters were all of a depth? they said no; yet they could not help them in that case; for, said they, *You shall find it deeper, or shallower, as you Believe in the King of the place.*"

## CHAPTER V

### HE CONDEMNED THE WORLD

THERE was nothing to arrest the author's progress after he had spoken of Enoch till he came to the case of Noah. He had begun by a reference to faith as a conviction of things not seen, and Noah displayed the quality in his unwavering belief that a peril which belonged to the unseen future was no vain imagination. His faith rested on God's declaration of judgment. It might indeed be supported by the wickedness of the world about him, just as the prophets inferred the inevitable punishment of Israel from Israel's sin. But the author lays stress exclusively on the divine warning which he had received. And the question may very easily arise, "Is there any conspicuous merit in such faith as Noah displayed?" For since it was God



who warned him, was it not a matter of course that he should believe?

There are many of our fellows whose promise is to us almost equivalent to a performance. It is only the consideration that human power is limited by conditions beyond man's control which prevents us from regarding the one with quite the same measure of confidence as the other. In God's case these conditions do not apply, and therefore His promises, unless He limits them by self-imposed conditions, have a certainty of fulfilment which can belong to no promises made by man. Accordingly there may seem to be no special virtue in Noah's faith such as would justify this distinguished mention. Nevertheless, I think the author was warranted in selecting Noah as one of his illustrations. For, in the first place, he proved his belief by action. It is one thing to have a mental certainty that some event is about to happen: it is quite another thing to submit our certainty to the practical test and to go on acting upon it for a long series of years. So that what we have before us is not simply a faith which believed God at the time when the warning

was given, but one which remained unshaken for a long period, and found expression in a task which became his constant occupation.

And we must remember that, however luminous a certainty may be at the moment of revelation, it cannot be maintained without great difficulty. For the vivid immediate impression quickly fades. It cannot live in the memory with the same intensity with which it was felt in experience. It fades inevitably as the radiance of the ecstatic illumination dies into the commonplace daylight. Inevitable doubts begin to arise, the intellect begins to criticise the experience, to question whether it may not have been a mere fancy. And all the more when there seems to be nothing to support it, when life goes on from day to day in its dull, monotonous routine, when there are no signs of approaching catastrophe, nothing to herald the coming storm. No credit was due to Noah that he believed God, but it is no small testimony in his favour that his faith stood the strain of so long a delay and the absence of any confirmation in the signs of the times.

But this was not all with which he had to contend. He had to maintain his faith in face of an unbelieving world. He alone among his contemporaries was pronounced righteous by God. The narrative gives us no hint of active opposition. It is often a stimulant to a man's faith when he has to suffer persecution and hostility. He is thrown on his defence, his combative instincts are aroused. It may not always be easy to face a frowning world, but it is certainly much harder to face a scoffing world.

When we consider the lapse of time, the constant wear to which his faith was exposed from trivial incident and unheroic commonplace, the strain placed upon it from the prolonged and prosaic character of his task, the keen shafts of ridicule, and the wet blankets of indifference, we may rate highly the patience of his faith. The things of which he was warned were not seen as yet when the warning was given, but they still remained unseen through all the slow process of construction until the whole was complete. And still no sign was made as, amid the blank unconcern or the unrestrained

hilarity of his doomed contemporaries, he entered into the ark. Then, when he was safe, the windows of heaven were opened, that the waters from the heavenly ocean above the firmament might pour through, and the fountains of the great submarine abyss might be broken up. Thus the waters which had been separated at Creation were mingled once more, and Chaos for a brief period resumed her ancient sway.

The writer tells us that thus Noah condemned the world. He does not mean that by constructing a shelter simply for himself and his family he doomed the rest of mankind to destruction. His thought is rather that the faith of Noah stood out in glaring contrast to the world's unbelief. Just as Lot seemed to those who were to marry his daughters as a mere jester when he told them that God would destroy Sodom, so Noah must have seemed to those who heard his prophecies of disaster. They could not believe his prediction of judgment, they met it all with incurable optimism. And so in our Lord's words, "They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage until the day

that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all." And how often history repeats itself, how many there are whose blind infatuation has carried them gaily forward to the very brink of ruin, and cast them down to destruction in a moment!

Noah condemned the world by the spectacle of his unshrinking faith, but he made no impression upon it. And it is this quality in the world which makes the effort to reform some people seem so hopeless. I always feel that we have least hope of success with those whom we cannot get to take life seriously. Those who are set in their antagonism to goodness, who throw themselves into active opposition, are less to be despaired of. For with them there is a certain earnestness and seriousness, a concentration of purpose, though directed to wrong ends. In short, they have character, though it be bad character. And there are numerous examples to show what valiant and loyal soldiers of righteousness they may prove if they can once be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. But what are we to do with the flippant and the

frivolous, in whose nature there is no depth, no reserve to which one can appeal? What can be done with the shallow, irresponsible people to whom the gravest moral and spiritual issues are less than an idle tale? There are many Sunday-school teachers who would gladly prefer the bad boy, as he is called, to the frivolous boy, and too often the frivolous boy becomes a frivolous man.

It is now many years since I read a passage in Demosthenes which made a permanent impression on me. The great orator, looking back over the time when the power of Philip was steadily growing, says that the Greek States realised that trouble was coming, only he adds "not upon themselves." In other words, they could read the signs of the times with sufficient clearness to perceive that the power of Macedonia threatened the independence of the other Greek communities, but they could never bring themselves to believe that they would be the victims of the same disaster. Such is the unwillingness of human nature to face the stern realities of life, such men's incredulity that the disaster they see

to be inevitable for others will overtake themselves.

Even blinder were the men of Noah's time, for they imagined that all would go on in its accustomed routine, and that there would be no catastrophe at all. But the forces which rule history are grave and often terrible. We may play with them as safely as with the forked lightning, the avalanche, or the earthquake. It is the mission of the Church to condemn the world's insensibility. But our Churches have too many in them who exhibit the same lack of moral seriousness. Few things are more ominous than the widespread disbelief in the great principle of retribution. No doubt the extravagances with which that doctrine has often been presented are responsible for not a little in the present recoil from it. We need to recapture the sense of the majesty of law, the unflinching sternness of the moral order, the unswerving movement of justice in its course, the loftiness of the demand upon us, the futility of our cowardly evasion.

Thus with rigorous self-discipline we rise to self-mastery, life becomes charged for us

with an eternal significance. Thus by our noble seriousness we may condemn the world's frivolity. By our steadfast conviction of the unseen we may reprove its crass incredulity, and become heirs "of the righteousness which is according to faith."



## CHAPTER VI

### THE TENT AND THE CITY

THE career of Abraham had naturally a special appeal to the author. He was pre-eminently the Father of the Faithful; and other New Testament writers, notably Paul, insist on the Old Testament references to his belief in God's promise. The rabbinical legend of his revolt against paganism may have been known to the author, and if so, it would have seemed to him to harmonise with the story of his later life. If it reflects a real uprising against idolatry on the part of those who led the migration from the East, the faith displayed in it would be of a signal character. For idolatry in the form in which it was practised was the deification of the sensuous and the material, while the revolt against it was occasioned by faith, that is, a realisation that religion is to be directed to the unseen rather than the visible.

The author, however, does not touch upon this tradition, but confines himself to the Biblical record, which was indeed rich in suggestive material for his purpose.

First of all, the faith of Abraham was displayed in the abandonment of his home in obedience to the call of God. From the worldly point of view, it was a quixotic enterprise on which he embarked. For he snapped many of the ties which at his age must have been hard to break. He left his country and his kindred, tearing himself up from the soil into which he had deeply struck his roots. And he took up the life of the nomad, with all its uncertainties and privation. The surrender of his home, with all its comforts and dear associations, would not have been so daring a venture from the standpoint of common sense had a fixed goal been in view. But the word came to him, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee." Thus, obedient to what he took to be the call of God, he began his journey without even knowing the destination to which he was bound. And he was content

to do this because he cast himself with such absolute confidence on the guidance of the invisible hand to lead him to the country God had in mind.

When we read the narrative in Genesis we naturally understand the land of Palestine to be the goal God destined for him. But if I rightly understand what the author of the Epistle means, he warns us to look deeper. It is true that he defines Palestine as the Land of Promise, and, so far, he sets his approval on the common interpretation of Genesis. But while he sees in Abraham's arrival in Palestine a fulfilment of the Divine promise, he is chiefly concerned to insist that this was not the complete fulfilment, and that Abraham's faith was revealed in his grasp of this fact. For the significant thing is, that even when he reached the Promised Land, he refused to identify it with the country of which God had spoken to him. "By faith he became a sojourner in the Land of Promise, as in a land not his own." Had he considered the land of Palestine to be an adequate fulfilment of what God designed, then he would naturally have settled down

in it—all the more that he looked for a city to be his settled abode. But he made no attempt to build a city or gain any foothold in the land. So far from that, he dwelt in tents, moving about from place to place, a stranger and a pilgrim, with no spot he could call his home. And by reminding us that he dwelt in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the writer recalls to us the long period over which this wandering life was spread. For he was already an old man when Isaac was born, and in extreme old age at the birth of Jacob. We might have anticipated that prolonged disappointment would have disillusioned him of his faith. But, so far from this, he held on to his nomad life, seeing son and grandson grow up before him, while the promise of God seemed to draw no nearer to its fulfilment. And at last he died, a worn-out old man, not having received the promise, but still clinging firmly to his faith.

The whole passage is, I have said, richly suggestive. The author has written it with a special eye upon his readers, between whose conditions and those of Abraham he sees a marked resemblance. For just as the patriarch

was called to break with the past and forsake the certainties of the visible present for the future and the intangible, so his readers were summoned to go forth to Jesus without the camp, bearing His reproach. If they desire to be true children of the Father of the Faithful they must imitate his courage and his decision, his willingness to give up everything in obedience to the call of God.

But there is in this passage also a message for ourselves. We are not indeed called upon to abandon the religion in which we have been brought up, though we may be called to give up cherished beliefs in obedience to the leading of the Spirit as He seeks to guide us into all truth. But leaving this aside, I wish to point out how much illumination the idea of faith receives from the case of Abraham.

The first thought which is suggested to us is that faith will not accept an unreal or premature fulfilment, though it be apparently a realisation of what was promised. We must remember that Canaan *was* the Promised Land, and is so described by the author, and therefore Abraham might reasonably have

rested content with this materialisation of the promise. But he detected an ideal element in it which could not be satisfied by any physical fulfilment. As he pondered upon it, the thought grew upon him that what God promised must be worthy of God. And thus he came to the conviction that the earthly Canaan could not be the land which God intended. He was looking for a city, and Canaan, it is true, had cities in abundance. Yet they did not satisfy his ideal, for in spite of their strength and antiquity he had the spiritual insight to discern that they were subject to the decay which characterises all earthly things. And such a decay, he realised, must inevitably overtake any city which he might himself seek to establish. No such transient structure could answer to the grandeur of his conception. "He looked for the city which hath the foundations." In other words, he looked for the city built on a basis of enduring stability, which no ravage of time could wear away, but which would last for eternity.

Such a city could be built by God alone; it belonged to heaven, and not to earth.

There, in the realm of the ideal, the abiding reality was to be found ; from the quivering instabilities of earth he turned to that foundation which could not be shaken, the eternal city designed and constructed by God before time or the world began to be. Therefore he was quite content to dwell in tents and have no fixed abode, since he realised that his earthly life was but a transient state, and that God had provided some better thing for him.

The next thought which is suggested to us is that we may be educated by illusion. Faith rises in its demand as the spiritual life is deepened and expanded. That to which it at first looks forward as a sufficient fulfilment of the promise, it comes, in the light of a broader and deeper experience, to regard as inadequate. Abraham had begun by looking for the Promised Land on earth, but by-and-by he came to see that this lower quest had been an illusion, designed to beckon him forward and then give way to a higher and more distant goal. And this is repeated in our own experience. The gracious condescension of God is revealed in this, that

He takes us where He finds us. Were He to place before us all that He has in mind for us, the very exaltation of the ideal might nullify its appeal to us. And so He sets before us some nearer prospect to allure us on the upward way. And this sways us till we outgrow it, and then He beckons us onward by a prospect more fitted to our maturer aspirations.

We learn also that faith judges the world at its true value. It is aware of its hollow pretensions to reality, and how delusive are its promises of permanence. It will therefore make no home in it, because it can be content only with that which abides. The world in its turn condemns faith's enterprise, disdainfully contrasting the rich treasures and solid comforts bestowed by Madam Bubble with the Christian's insubstantial dreams. But Passion clutches the immediate enjoyment, while Patience looks with tranquillity to the end, and is content to wait. The victory which overcomes the world is our faith; but we need not wonder if the world's bleared eyes see in it only defeat.



## CHAPTER VII

### HOMESICK FOR HEAVEN

WHEN the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "These all died in faith," we must not understand him to mean the innumerable multitude of Abraham's descendants to whom he has just alluded, nor yet, I think, does he include Abel, Enoch, and Noah. The context indicates that he has in mind specially those to whom the promise had been revealed—that is, Abraham himself, together with Isaac and Jacob, who were "heirs with him of the same promise."

Already we have seen that Abraham held fast his faith, and had attained the conviction that not on earth but the other side of death the city he sought was to be found. Unlike Lot, he refused to force on a premature realisation by fixing his abode in a city of Canaan. In Lot's case, it is true, the choice

of a city was singularly unfortunate, and its abandoned wickedness led to God's special intervention for its destruction. We can hardly imagine that Abraham himself could have tolerated a life in Sodom, which was made tolerable to his more worldly nephew only by its prospect of worldly advantage.

There were other cities of Canaan, however, that would have been less uncongenial. It is true that the Canaanites were later visited with judgment for their sin, but the iniquity of the Amorite was not yet full, as was the more eminent wickedness of the cities of the plain. Even had these cities seemed to him altogether unfit for a dwelling-place, he might nevertheless have sought to found a new city. But this he refuses to contemplate because he would not reduce his expectation to the level of earth. And therefore he and his son and grandson died in faith and not in realisation. They had seen and greeted the promise from afar; they had been on the Delectable Mountains "to the top of a high hill called Clear," whence they had looked through the shepherds' Perspective Glass, and seen the gates of the Celestial City. But, unlike

Christian and Hopeful, as we shall see later, they were far from realisation, even at death. But faith takes long views, and is not dismayed by the prospect of indefinite delay.

The author now proceeds to establish his statement by the confession of the patriarchs themselves. When Sarah was dead, and Abraham had mourned for her, he confessed to the children of Heth that he was "a stranger and a sojourner" with them. And when Pharaoh asked Jacob how many were the days of the years of his life, he described his existence and the existence of his predecessors as a "pilgrimage" or "sojournings." Thus Canaan was for Abraham a land of wandering, and life was for Jacob a time of pilgrimage. But when people speak in this way, the author proceeds, "they make it plain that they are seeking after a country of their own." The principle on which this conclusion rests is not expressed by the author, but a moment's consideration makes it clear what he means. It is not man's natural state to remain content with an unsettled abode. Pilgrimage is a provisional, and not a permanent, condition. And therefore the desire

that was implicit in the confession was for a resting-place and a home. It is a home-sickness which inspires such a confession, and it is *home-sickness* in the strict sense of the term which the author has here in mind. The English translation scarcely brings out the full significance of his words. Instead of "They are seeking after a country of their own," it would be better to render, "They are seeking after their native land."

And it is only in the light of this that we realise the full force of what follows. For they had a native land already—that which they had previously abandoned in obedience to the Divine call; and had it been home-sickness for it which prompted their pathetic confession, they could readily have relieved it by a return to the land they had left. But they had diagnosed their case too well to imagine that a home-sickness for their native country could be alleviated by a return to Ur of the Chaldees. It was a better land on which their hopes and aspirations were set. For their earthly home was not their only fatherland. Faith carried them past the best that earth had to show; it called them away from

the land where their physical being had its origin, and reminded them of that heavenly region from which their spirits had come. Heaven is the home of the spirit and our true fatherland. And faith which rose to so splendid a height in penetrating to the central reality, and brushed aside all lower satisfactions, was a faith which God felt to be worthy of Himself. Therefore He did not blush to call Himself their God. He honoured their daring confidence by preparing for them a city.

Many of the lessons that emerge from this passage have already been touched upon, but we have not as yet exhausted its message for us, and on some points of it we may briefly linger. First there is the pertinacity of faith, its refusal to be crushed by disappointment. Many Christians are sadly deficient in the heroism of endurance. They have no gift of holding on. Even trifling difficulties seem to paralyse the faith of many, and how few there are who can rise above all the contradiction of appearances and keep a faith unshaken in God. And the faith which the writer commends to us is especially admirable in its triumph over death.

While there is life, we say, there is hope. And even to the last a man may cling to an enterprise in whose fulfilment he has reposed his confidence. But death is irrevocable so far as this world is concerned, and the strain which it puts on faith is of an altogether peculiar character. The perennial hope which has vanquished the temptation to despair may well be killed out by the cruel certainty of death. In that crisis there is no anchor that can hold us except the anchor that is cast within the veil.

But the words have a wider application than the author gives to them. There are causes with which we identify ourselves, to which we are deeply pledged and to whose furtherance we surrender all our powers. It is inevitable, when these causes seem to make no headway or even to lose ground as their supporters fall away, that we should be tempted to abandon our own faith. It is a testing experience to see the ranks thinned by defection and by death while the cause attracts few new recruits to fill their place. That is the hour and the power of darkness, and the tragic sequel is abandonment and flight. It

is good for us if, when we are gone, it can be said of us that we were not baffled by apparent failure or defeat, but passed away believing that the cause would ultimately triumph.

In the next place, we must rest upon the promises. It might, indeed, be said that our own age, with its rebellion against traditional views, its widespread unbelief, and its heart-breaking indifference to the things of deepest moment, is less favourable to faith than the earlier ages when religion was so largely unquestioned. Faith finds it hard to breathe in so asphyxiating an atmosphere. And no doubt the difficulties of belief are in some ways much greater in our own time. On the other hand, the supports of faith are also much stronger. It is not with us as with them, for they, living in the twilight, had the bare promise to rest upon; we have seen already a large fulfilment, and have our guarantee in God's final self-revelation in Christ.

If our heart is stayed on the promises, this implies that we turn from the present to the future, and from earth to heaven. And this raises for us a difficult problem. How are we to adjust the two? We are chained to

time and sense by bonds which can be snapped only by death. We must eat and drink, we must have clothing and shelter, and our standard of living is largely determined for us by forces external to ourselves. And all of these things taken together carry with them duties and responsibilities which we have no moral right to set aside. For others, as well as for ourselves, we are forced to play our part. And how little leisure, it would seem, there often is for anything else, especially in an age of pitiless competition and insatiate greed! Is it possible for us, then, to be Christians, it may be asked in despair, if the world makes such cruel and exclusive demands upon us? It is, we may say in reply, the inward attitude which is really important. While we are outwardly absorbed in the tasks of life we should be inwardly detached, we should look at ourselves mainly in the light of strangers and pilgrims. Yet I hardly like to use the term home-sickness for heaven to describe our ideal state of mind. Rather our ideal should be to keep our faith so strong that inwardly, at any rate, we still live within the veil. Were we living on the level of our



privileges we should alway be sitting with Christ in heavenly places. Heaven is our native land, and it is there only that the spirit can be truly at home ; but even now faith can enable us to enter in at its gates and breathe its atmosphere, since Jesus has dedicated for us the new and the living way.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SUBLIME VENTURE OF FAITH

HAD the faith of Abraham been a selfish faith, had he looked forward simply to heaven for himself alone, one great element in the trial of his faith would have been missing. But he looked for a city, and a city is thronged and populous, not constituted by one alone. Moreover, it was to his own posterity that the promise on which he rested, and to whose fulfilment he looked forward, was based. But the years went by, and the promise seemed to be mocked by God's inexplicable delay. For he was a childless man, and, though later Ishmael was born to him, yet he learnt that Ishmael stood outside the range of the promise. At last, however, his faith triumphed over nature, and Isaac was born. With the birth of Isaac the promise seemed in a fair way of fulfilment.

And now there came the severest strain to Abraham's faith. Everything hung on the single thread of a single life. Dangers are all about us, and where much hangs on one life, with what anxious care it is surrounded and shielded from all peril! We may well imagine how mindful Abraham would be of the vast destinies which were bound up with the life of his son. How dark and strange, then, must have seemed the command which came to him from the lips of God, "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Even had Abraham been an ordinary father, and Isaac just an ordinary son, the command would have had in it something strange and repulsive.

What the story is intended to convey, and how we are to deal with the moral difficulties that have been raised about it, I do not stay to discuss, since they were not present apparently to the author of the Epistle. But take it how we will, the trial of faith involved in the command to a man to sacrifice his

own son was very great. Had He who commanded it been as some heathen deities, the difficulty on this score would have been much slighter, for it was their manner to demand a man's dearest in sacrifice. But the God of Abraham was of a character far other than that. And the trial was intensified in his case by the hopes which were concentrated in Isaac. There was no other son who could take his place, for Ishmael had been definitely excluded so far as the promise was concerned. The Divine word had run, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." The author accordingly describes him as Abraham's only-begotten son.

And so, Abraham, who had gladly received the promises, was summoned to a sacrifice which, if it were consummated, would make the promises of none effect. What made his case all the more difficult was that it was God Himself who exacted the surrender. In other words, He who had made the promises, who had, on the strength of these promises, summoned Abraham to make a great sacrifice of home and fatherland, who had as yet fulfilled nothing of them, now seemed to mock him by

frustrating them altogether. What thoughts might well have stolen into the patriarch's mind! In what a sinister light God's whole treatment of him might have seemed to stand! How he might have felt that God had befooled him and played with him! And, even apart from this, what kind of a God could He be who asked for a sacrifice such as this?

Over all these temptations the faith of Abraham was victorious. There seems to be no suggestion that he expected God to intervene at the last moment, and deliver his son. God exacted the offering, and His servant would not flinch from a perfect obedience. And, therefore, Isaac was to him as if he were already dead. But he did not on that account allow his estimate of God's character to be disturbed. He did not offer Him a servile compliance while in his heart he bitterly upbraided His caprice. In spite of the stunning blow, beneath which He might well have reeled and fallen, he held fast his faith not only in God, but in the fulfilment of the promise. For God was stronger than death, and, though a rescue from death was a thing

unheard of, he believed that even this miracle would be wrought rather than that God should suffer His word to be brought to nought. So the author tells us, "From thence in a parable he received him back."

It is true Isaac did not actually die beneath his father's knife, but he was already dead so far as the patriarch's intention went: a moment more, and the blow would have been struck. The father had tasted the full bitterness of death in anticipation, the death of his dearest at his own hand. He had tasted it as a long-drawn-out agony, through all the preparations for the journey and the journey itself, the victim's unconsciousness contrasting so pitifully with his own absorbing grief. And he was resolute to drain it to the very dregs. It was not for him to parley with God, to dwell on impossibilities, to argue as to the reasonableness of the demand. On God he throws the responsibility, and leaves it with Him to find a way out of the blind alley into which He seemed to be leading His servant.

Historically regarded, we must date the rise of a belief in a resurrection late in the history

of Israel's religion. I can find no trace of it earlier than the latter part of the fourth century before Christ. But it was implicit in the religion from the first, and our Lord revealed His insight into Scripture in the very striking reply that he gave to the Sadducees. It is a complete mistake, in my judgment, to follow those interpreters who can see in His reply little more than a verbal quibble. What he means is, that when the living God has taken men into covenant fellowship with Himself and calls Himself their God, the relationship cannot be other than a perpetual one; His immortality guarantees theirs.

This has a bearing on our present discussion. Had Isaac passed into extinction, the promises of God would have been brought to nought. But that God should fail in His promises is to faith, of all things, the most intolerable. Its motto is, "Yea, let God be true, though every man prove a liar." Therefore faith laughs even death to scorn, and accounts that this will be as futile as every other obstacle to the fulfilment of His purpose. Although it was only in a much later age that the children of Abraham gained the

belief in a resurrection, the author represents Abraham as reaching the conviction that God would fulfil His promise concerning Isaac, even though he surrendered him to death ; and while no belief in a resurrection was present to his mind so far as others were concerned, for Isaac faith postulated a return from death.

The situation of Abraham stands by itself ; but it is not without its counterpart in our own life. The ways of God are so incalculable and so strange. He leads us along a certain path ; the guidance is clear, and we cannot miss the way. And suddenly the path seems to come to an end. Perhaps we are like the escaped Israelites at the Red Sea, entangled between the mountains, the sea in front of us and Egypt hot upon our trail. And the tragedy of such a situation is all the deeper for our previous experience. The leading of God had seemed to be so direct, and it is God Himself who suddenly appears to throw all into confusion and to stultify His previous action. It is our duty to go forward at His bidding and cast upon Him the responsibility for our deliverance. And then, as we look



back afterwards on our experience which seemed so unaccountable, we shall praise the wisdom of God that has challenged the daring of our faith to scale the dizzier heights and move securely over the treacherous and perilous ways.

## CHAPTER IX

### DEATH-BED FAITH

THE author of the Epistle to the Hebrews seems to have found much less indication of faith in the lives of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, than in the life of Abraham. In each case it is a death-bed faith that is mentioned. There might seem to be in this a tacit criticism, as if the author would say to us, however little faith they exhibited in their lives, at least they displayed this grace in death. But we must not permit the phrase "a death-bed repentance" to colour our conception of a death-bed faith. We always think of a death-bed repentance with a pity which it is difficult to cleanse from contempt. In the early Church those who received what was known as clinical baptism were regarded as unworthy to aspire to the higher offices in the Church. They had received baptism on a sick-bed

because without it they thought that they could not be saved. The rite was regarded as efficacious, but those who had been driven to receive it by a selfish cowardice rather than by genuine sorrow for their sin and desire for a better life were considered to be disqualified for the loftier dignities of ecclesiastical position.

And we, too, feel the meanness of the man who has lived for himself while strength of brain and muscle were left to him, and offers a spent and exhausted manhood to God and dedicates to Him the dregs of his life. But the death-bed faith is altogether different. For while the experience of dying may stimulate the penitence of the sinner, it may depress the faith of the believer. Body and spirit are so intimately associated that the experiences of the one react upon the other. When the vital powers are failing, and the blood courses feebly in the veins, and the last enemy is about to storm the very citadel of our being, it is not to be wondered at if the spirit also should share in the lassitude and exhaustion of the body, that the confidence which had burnt with such radiant glow should become well-nigh extinct.

Therefore it is that, when we gather about the grave to bury the dead, our minds are carried forward to our own crisis, and we pray, "Suffer us not, through any pains of death, to fall from Thee." But we are not terrified at the prospect, because our destiny rests in stronger hands than our own. We can well picture to ourselves the time when, in extreme feebleness, the grasp with which we have clung to God relaxes, and we have no strength of spirit left within us. It would, indeed, be a desperate emergency if at a time so critical all depended on ourselves. But we can look forward without dismay since we know that our salvation is in our Saviour's care. We are His sheep, and none can pluck us out of His hand. He has promised to be with us to the end, and it is at the end that we may most urgently need Him. Not even death can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There is, then, a peculiar eminence attaching to a death-bed faith, to the faith which triumphs over the weakness of nature ; and, while the vital forces are dying down to a glimmering spark, itself burns with a clear

and steady flame. It is faith maintained under supreme difficulty. And whereas a death-bed repentance implies a previous life of sin, the kind of death-bed faith to which I am referring implies that faith has been the rule of life. It must have strong roots in a man's past to face unbroken the final storm. Hence, when the author singles out in the case of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph the closing scene, he is tacitly saying to us that here we have a life of faith on which death placed a fitting crown. Indeed, he has already told us as much about two of them when he said that Abraham dwelt in tents, with Isaac and Jacob heirs with him of the same promise. Their faith in God's fulfilment of His promise had been manifested in this that, like Abraham, they clung to the nomad's mode of life, refusing to seek on earth a fixed abode. And in the case of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, it is specially with the promise that the author is concerned.

Of the first we read, "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even concerning things to come." At first sight the statement is very puzzling, for the story in Genesis tells us that

Isaac blessed Jacob in mistake for Esau. The whole story jars upon us as we read it. First of all, there is the favouritism betrayed by the parents towards their children. In the case of Isaac this quality, always reprehensible, seems to become even contemptible because of the reason which is given for it. Esau was a hunter, who gratified his father's selfish love for savoury food, and on this squalid basis his preference for Esau reposed. But Jacob turned away from the adventurous life which charmed his brother, and led a quieter, tamer life. In the author's significant words, "He sod pottage." He was what we should call a domesticated man; he dwelt in tents, we are further informed, and we can read between the lines that he had won his mother's heart, and become her favourite by stopping at home and helping her in the house-work.

Now there is this element of good in the situation, that the love of the parents was not concentrated upon the same child. For one of the worst tragedies is the tragedy of the neglected child, who is made to feel that he is neglected, with all the bitterness, discouragement, envy, heart-ache, and loneliness which

such a lot involves. But this is the only element which relieves the story. For while it is good that the parents should not be united in the love of one and neglect of the other, and while their love should have been free from the taint of self-seeking, they ought to have been united in an equal and unselfish love to both. But as it was, they degraded love into a minister of discord. It drove a wedge between husband and wife, and whereas they ought to have lived in harmony with each other, and shared a common concern for the welfare of their children, we see Rebecca treading the tortuous paths of deceit and scheming to outwit her husband that she may further the interests of her favourite son. We may, indeed, be sure that a tragic history lies behind this scene. This is not the first time, we may be certain, that she has schemed to befool her husband, and taught Jacob to be a trickster and a liar.

And thus, as the background of the story, we have an atmosphere of selfish favouritism, of treachery and intrigue. In such an atmosphere suspicion naturally flourishes, and we can see alike from Jacob's dread of detection

and the elaborate precautions taken to defeat it, and from Isaac's home questions to his son, how the old man's mind was possessed with the thought that his son might deceive him, and obtain the blessing by fraud. And by fraud he did obtain it, and this makes it hard to understand why the author should have assigned Isaac's action to faith.

In our attempt to solve this problem we must first draw a distinction between the promise itself and the line along which the promise was to be inherited. We need have no hesitation in recognising that the faith of Isaac was at least displayed in this, that he held fast to the confidence that God's promise would be fulfilled. The fact that he made a mistake as to the divine designation is not of such moment. It is true that we may put down his mistake to a lack of insight, yet his lack of insight is of an intellectual rather than of a spiritual kind. And there was much to suggest that Jacob could not be the heir to the promise. Yet it is true that he blessed Jacob by faith ; for, when he was undeceived and learnt how he had been duped, he did not call back his blessing and substitute



a curse. Indeed, the whole attitude of antiquity towards the curse and the blessing would have been against his doing so. Men of the ancient world thought of the curse and the blessing as passing beyond a man's control once he had uttered them. And Isaac also felt that, once the blessing had been pronounced, he could not recall it: it would surely work out its own accomplishment. "I have blessed him, yea, and he shall be blessed." We may indeed suppose that, in the exalted utterance with which he had blessed his son, he saw the evidence of an inspiration higher than his own. At any rate, he had the faith to recognise that Jacob, and not Esau, was the chosen of God. Yet he also blessed Esau. At first he shook under the shock of his discovery and saw, with cruel lucidity, all the pathos and tragedy of Esau's rejection. He could see no alleviation. And even the words of his blessing sound, at first, more like a curse. Far away from the fatness of the earth and the dew of heaven Esau's dwelling is to be, his living must be won by the sword, and he shall be in bondage to his brother. But the blessing comes at the end.

He is at last to break loose and shake his brother's yoke from his neck.

It is true that we still feel the pressure of the difficulty raised by the sordid elements in the story, at least as far as they affect Isaac himself. Yet they do not contradict the assertion of his faith; indeed, it is one of the difficulties which we have to meet that a lofty religion is often matched with a too indifferent morality. In the case of Isaac, however, we should perhaps speak rather of moral weakness; and indeed he leaves upon us, on the whole, rather a colourless impression. The problem is much more acute in the case of Jacob.

From the case of Isaac the author passes to that of Jacob, and in this instance also he speaks only of the last scenes. If it is not paradoxical to say so, there are two things which seem surprising. One is that, Jacob being what he was, the author should have included him at all; the other that, having selected him for inclusion, he should say no more about him.

The story of Jacob leaves upon the modern reader, at any rate, a singularly unpleasant

impression. In some ways he is one of the most repulsive characters in Biblical history. It was bad enough that he should be a schemer, a trickster, a liar, and a cheat. It was no credit to him that his career was so deeply marked by self-seeking and greed. But these qualities became doubly and trebly base through the way in which they were exercised. For he was always seeking to take people at a disadvantage, to make his market out of their necessity or distress, to throw all considerations of honour and duty to the winds, when by doing so his own temporal advantage could be secured. And what made it worst of all was that he used his wits and his unscrupulousness to cheat those who ought to have been sacred to him.

What match for this shrewd and coldly prudent man could his father be when he was dying, his senses too dull to detect the fraud, even though he was uneasy and suspicious that a fraud was being perpetrated on him? Or how could the frank, generous, and impulsive Esau, who lived only for the moment, with no thought for the future, contend on equal terms with the brother who

was always watching for an occasion to trip him? And Laban, who was more on Jacob's level, and as little troubled by scruples, came off worst in the end from his long struggle with him.

Even at Bethel, terrified as he was when he learnt that he had trespassed on sacred ground, he nevertheless was sufficiently true to himself to make a bargain with God. Only if Yahweh protects him and gives him food and raiment, and brings him back to his father's house in peace, will he take Him for his own God and return to God a tenth of what He may give him.

Yet it would be a mistake were we to turn from Jacob with loathing, and give him no credit for loftier qualities. The fact remains that Jacob, and not the more attractive Esau, was chosen to be the heir of the promise, and the reason for this we should seek to understand. And this leads me to the second point which I have described as surprising. When the author had once decided to include Jacob, we are astonished that he made so little of him. For while Jacob stands very low in the moral, he stands high in the re-

ligious scale, and peculiarly in the very quality which the author commends to our notice. And if we run over his career from this point of view, we shall realise how much material the author might have found in it.

However vile we may feel Jacob's treatment of Esau in the matter of the birthright to have been, yet it would be an injustice to forget that there is another side to the story. In their estimate of the value of the birthright, Jacob was immeasurably superior to Esau. He wishes the promise which had been made to Abraham and to Isaac to be transferred to him; and that was because he set its proper value upon it. But Esau was, as our author elsewhere describes him, "a profane person," or, as we might put it, an utterly unspiritual man; and therefore the promise mattered little to him. The present, with its urgent necessity, was of far more moment than the distant and uncertain future. He had no more sense of the true relative value of things than the child or the savage; and therefore he was utterly unfitted, by the very constitution of his nature, to become the heir of the promise. He lived

for animal gratification, with a soul little better than the animals, the hunting of which was his chief end in life.

But though he sold his birthright without compunction, just to still his clamorous hunger, reflection seems to have brought him to some sense of his folly. For when Jacob cheats him of the blessing he learns the news of his brother's treachery with passionate grief and indignation, and utters an exceeding bitter cry. And here, again, Jacob's keenness implies how high a value he set upon his father's blessing, which also had reference to the future of his posterity rather than to the immediate present.

Then we have the experience at Bethel, where Jacob's faculty of spiritual vision is displayed in his dream. In it he sees the way opened between heaven and earth, and God's angels moving to and fro upon it. He even sees God and hears His voice. Such dreams as these, we may be sure, never came to Esau. He was imprisoned in the sensuous and the material, his horizon was contracted, his sky not far away. For him there was no open heaven, no constant commerce with

the unseen world, no vision of God to awe or to inspire him. Nor was this a unique experience in Jacob's career, for other visions are recorded to have been divinely vouchsafed to him. Singularly striking was his experience at Peniel.

We need not inquire into the curious and interesting problems which the narrative presents to the student of religious ideas, but the depth which there was in Jacob's nature, and which made him so much greater a man than his shallow and impatient brother, is displayed in the resolute courage with which he held on to his divine adversary and, even when his thigh had been dislocated, made him rise above his weakness and his pain till, by sheer tenacity of purpose, he wrung the blessing which he craved from the angel.

And there is a note of dependence on God, and of humility, as he confronts the great peril of his encounter with Esau, which shows that the better elements of his nature were beginning to gain upon the baser. From now onwards he steadily grows upon us. Retribution overtakes him in even greater measure than before. He passes through

fierce fires of bereavement and sorrow, and emerges purified and chastened. But at eventide there is light, and he closes his days in peace. And it is on the end, rather than anything else, that the author touches. He does not say, as we might have anticipated: "By faith Jacob saw heaven opened, by faith he wrestled with God, and prevailed." Perhaps he felt that his earlier career was too marked by shiftiness and baseness to be fitly introduced in such a chapter.

Moreover, his mind is dwelling upon the promises, and the glories of Jacob's descendants. Yet he does not make any reference to the blessing of his sons, but to the blessing of his grandsons. And the reason for this is, perhaps, not difficult to understand. For in the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh he guided his hands wittingly, and laid the right hand on Ephraim, and the left on Manasseh.

The scene gains in significance when we compare it with the blessing he had himself received, for in both cases it was the younger son who received the chief blessing, and in each case the father was blind. But while Isaac could not rise superior to his blindness,



and thus was the victim of his younger son's deceit, Jacob was not at the mercy of his physical senses, but rightly distinguished those whom he had before him. With Isaac, too, the blessing, according to the view of antiquity, has something magical about it—it brings about what it predicts. But in Jacob's blessing a higher note is struck. The crossing of his hands is not caprice or favouritism, it is a reverent recognition of the divine choice, in harmony with which he acts. Thus, at the close of a life which he describes as a pilgrimage, whose days have been few and evil, in Canaan a wanderer, for long years a sojourner in the East, and now a dweller in Egypt, he yet holds fast to his belief in the promise. Not only does he see for his descendants a return to Canaan, but a lofty destiny for the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

It is the same interest which leads the author to select the closing scene in the life of Joseph. He too joined with his father in the belief that God would bring them out of Egypt, and, as the author tells us, he gave commandment concerning his bones.

In that hour of triumph when they escaped from Egypt, he desired, so far as that could be, himself to participate. To our point of view, for which all lands are alike sacred, Joseph's desire appeals much less. For us, too, the physical tabernacle which we shed at death is not of such significance as it was in Egypt; perhaps in his request we may detect the influence of the Egyptian environment. There is one point of interest which may be touched on in closing. Jacob wishes to be buried in Canaan by his sons; Joseph, however, desires that his body may abide with his people till the divine summons to leave Egypt should come to them. Perhaps nothing more is implied by this than that Jacob had ties with Canaan much closer than those of Joseph.

## CHAPTER X

### FAITH'S SUBLIME RENUNCIATION

WHILE the author says but little of the faith displayed by Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, he has much more to say concerning the faith of Moses. And this was natural. No patriotic Hebrew who looked back with love and pride on the early history of his race could fail to accord a pre-eminent place to Moses. To him, across the intervening centuries, a grateful nation looked back as the founder of its political existence and the revealer of its law. But the author does not include Moses in his list merely because he was too great a man to be omitted, but because his career was so singularly marked by the quality of religious insight and lofty self-renouncing heroism.

But before the author comes to Moses himself he refers to the faith of his parents.

They hid their child three months in defiance of the king's commandment. His rare beauty they divined to be a token of some high destiny reserved for him. And in the courage of this faith which beheld in the visible a presage of the unseen future they bravely hid their child. It is a little remarkable that the author does not proceed to remind us how, when it was no longer possible to conceal him, they entrusted him to God's care on the bosom of the Nile, and thus unwittingly gave him the opportunity of his career.

From the parents the author passes on to the son, and speaks first of his renunciation. Moses had been brought up in the court of Pharaoh with all the advantages which such a position could offer. He had been trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and there was no sphere short of the throne itself which he could not have filled, and filled worthily. For he was one of those in whom genius and opportunity have met together. There are many who are born to high estate for whom every avenue of service and distinction is open, but they have no talent to turn to account their golden chances. And there

are others, of strong and commanding genius, born in obscurity, imperfectly trained, thwarted in their ambitions by a thousand vexatious hindrances, who only after years of neglect and disappointment succeed in winning the recognition which befits their powers. But Moses seemed to be the spoilt child of fortune. Had he been born in a lowly Egyptian instead of a lowly Hebrew household, there would have been no urgent peril forcing his parents to set him afloat in the frail ark of papyrus, and thus bring him to the notice of Pharaoh's daughter. And in Egypt, at that time, there seemed to be everything which could satisfy the loftiest aspiration.

Egypt was a great empire; she vied with Babylon as a centre of art and science, and as a home of culture. Here the most splendid genius could find an ample scope. If his tastes had led him to war, then he might have won fame as a great leader and strategist; if to diplomacy, he could hold his own with the astutest statesmen of foreign courts; or he could remain at home and become a second Joseph, the virtual ruler of the land. Or if his inclinations had led him to the life of

the student, what fairer opportunity could man desire than, master already of the wisdom of Egypt, to wrestle with nature for her secrets, and enlarge the boundary of knowledge? We need to remember these possibilities if we are to measure aright his renunciation, and comprehend the daring and the insight of his faith.

The author then presents Moses to us at the parting of the ways. Before him stretched a great and dazzling career, adequate it might seem to the glorious powers with which nature had endowed him. And along this alluring path, when the time came for him to make his decision, he resolutely refused to walk: he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." We can well imagine how those who had often envied his good fortune would scoff at his quixotic folly in thus flinging away a position which they would have sacrificed much to win. But the author sees in it no indication of blindness on Moses' part, but rather an evidence of his deep spiritual insight.

In the first place, the act of renunciation was itself an act of unusual keenness of per-

ception, for there was so much which might have been urged on the other side. It is generally not difficult to find specious reasons for doing something which we very much want to do. It so often happens that the intellect is the slave of the will, and we can make out an excellent case for following the bent of our desires. And in the case of Moses the arguments against the course he adopted were really cogent. There was the general principle that it is usually best to stay where Providence has placed us. No doubt it often happens that this principle may be overruled by a higher, that there are exceptions which warrant a departure from this course. But in the case of Moses it might well have been argued that this was pre-eminently one of those cases where the rule held good. For what, it might plausibly have been urged, had Providence given him such a position except that he might use it? And to the plea that he was making the renunciation for the sake of his people, how very effective the reply would be: "If you wish to help your people, stay where you are. You have the opportunity, as the son of

Pharaoh's daughter, to do much in alleviation of their lot and making their life more tolerable, whereas by flinging your position away, you bring yourself down to their level and lose all power of effective assistance. Why sacrifice a fulcrum which gives you such a leverage and try to raise your people by a dead lift ? ”

This is one of those plausible arguments which might deceive the very elect. And it is a singular example of Moses' insight that he did not suffer himself to be deluded by it. He had the inward certainty that he was summoned to this high task, and therefore he would not let himself be beguiled into a course which, however plausible the arguments, contradicted his fundamental conviction. We are not in a position to recover the line of thought which led him to his ultimate determination, but one or two considerations may quite possibly have swayed him.

There is the general principle that we are bound to be more careful when the course of action we think of adopting is one that conduces to our own pleasure or advantage. We do not readily acknowledge these things



to ourselves, and indeed it is very easy for us to be the victims of unconscious bias. No doubt it often happens that the right course of conduct is also the more agreeable, but in view of the peril I have mentioned we must take special precaution to be sure of our ground.

Then, in the next place, would it have been so easy for Moses, with the best intentions in the world, to have done much for his people if he had remained in Pharaoh's court? He would have inevitably found strong forces working against him. The opposition which vested interests present to progress all reformers know to their cost, and against these Moses would have been forced to struggle.

Again, it was necessary for Moses to make up his mind what he would do in those cases where loyalty to Israel was incompatible with loyalty to Egypt. His position was a very delicate one, and he was bound to be exceptionally careful. He might so easily be discredited by a false step, the cry might so readily be raised that he was traitorously sacrificing the interests entrusted to his care. And if he tried to hold the balance even,

he would have quickly learnt that it is the fate of the moderate man to be stoned by the extremists on both sides.

Moreover, as time went on his generous enthusiasms were likely to fade. The idealist would have degenerated into the practical man, and the official palliations of abuses and tyranny would have come glibly from his lips. It was better for Moses himself, better, too, we may be sure, for the cause he had at heart, that he should make a definite break with his past and devote himself whole-heartedly to his people. And that he saw this so clearly and steadily, that his judgment was not swayed by self-interest or led astray by sophistries, justifies the author when he finds in his renunciation the proof of his faith.

The next point in which the author bids us note the faith of Moses is that he saw in Israel the people of God. It is difficult for us to realise how daring such a faith was, for we look back across the intervening millenniums and see with what unique lustre Israel has shone, and how singularly it has justified Moses' estimate. We think of all the splendid galaxy of saints and prophets,

of sages and psalmists, who so gloriously vindicated Israel's right to the title. But all this still lay in the future to Moses. He knew nothing of the lofty spiritual achievements which awaited his race. It was rather a mere horde of slaves, with all that this implies. For we know what slavery does for men, how it takes the pith out of their manhood and grinds them into abject submission, how it creates a degraded slave-morality of its own, underhand and obsequious.

Moreover, the conditions under which they lived were of a most unfavourable kind. Domestic slavery existed among the Hebrews at a later period; but in a large number of cases the slave, especially if himself a Hebrew, was probably as well-off as if he had been set free, and his interests were guarded by law. But the Hebrews in Egypt were engaged on public works. Their position was such that it mattered little to their masters whether they lived or died, the main point in Egypt's policy was to keep them under. What, then, must have been their chance of living the higher life, crushed and brutalised as they were, turned into mere

machines for the enrichment of their tyrants, their spirit broken, their hope gone, the memory of the inheritance a vanishing dream? Cowed by the lash and imprecations of their overseers, worn out by nightfall with their exacting toil, their life was no land of far horizons and boundless hope, but shut down to the immediate, inexorable present. For them the past with its splendid memories, the future with its high aspirations, were alike swallowed up in the urgency of their daily task.

And it was this people, raised, it might seem, little above the beasts, whom Moses discerned to be the people of God. What keenness of spiritual insight to strike through all that uncouth exterior, those repulsive appearances, and detect Israel's unique genius for religion, buried as it might seem past all prospect of resurrection! It might indeed be said that it was less wonderful for Moses to understand it, since he shared so remarkably the religious endowment of his race, and this gave him a sympathetic perception of the spiritual quality of his people. Yet we must remember that this was perhaps more

than counterbalanced by the distance which circumstances had placed between them, for Moses had been brought up in the court of Pharaoh in a life of luxury, culture, and refinement. One could have understood it if he had viewed his people with a repulsion all the more intense that he could not escape from the bond of blood that bound them together. Yet he rose superior to this temptation, and did not stifle the conviction, of which his faith assured him, that these degraded and despised bondsmen were indeed the people of God.

And therefore he chose to suffer affliction with them. His refusal to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter involved that he should become one with his brethren. Like Christ, Moses had in his measure to lay aside his high position, and not be ashamed to call his people brethren. And participation in their lot involved affliction. We do not, of course, read that Moses became a slave, toiling to build the treasure cities of the Pharaoh, nor are we to suppose that the author meant to supplement the story of Exodus in that sense. But the possibility of this was involved, and in any case he ultimately had

to endure hardness with them that he might become the captain of their salvation from Egypt. Yet he deliberately chose this lot with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

This brings us to the next point in which Moses' faith was exemplified: he saw that it would be sin for him to stay where he was. I imagine that the term, "the pleasures of sin," which the author here employs, is frequently misinterpreted. It rather suggests to us the vicious and sensual indulgence by which courts have often been degraded. But that is surely not what he has in mind. We must remember that we are dealing with one of the world's great men, not with one who could be satisfied by base and vile pleasures, but one whose nature demanded a larger and a loftier satisfaction. It was natural that he should crave for a worthy field on which his splendid powers might be exercised, such as his position at Egypt's court could grant him. And such use of his position was not in itself sinful.

There was nothing intrinsically wrong in a career of learning or statesmanship, diplo-

macy or art. But Moses had the insight to detect that these things were sinful for him. It required no special insight to perceive the sinfulness of vicious pleasures. The insight was displayed in his realisation that things intrinsically harmless were sinful for him because they were incompatible with the acceptance of the task to which in his inmost heart he knew himself to be summoned. Hence he turned from these inviting paths, blameless though they were in themselves, since duty bade him forsake them for a darker and more perilous way.

In another respect the faith of Moses is shown to be eminent in that he realised that the pleasures of sin could not last. If he enjoyed them, it could be but for a season. Now this brings before us the magic of sin. It is not easy for a man before he commits a sin to look at it from the point of view which he will adopt towards it after he has committed it. The illusion of sin is what gives it its fatal power. It casts a glamour over the eyes of the tempted, so that they cannot penetrate through the radiant appearance to the hideous and loathsome reality.

It captures and inflames the imagination, muffles the conscience, and paralyses the will, makes itself seem the most desirable of all things, the one beatitude needed to crown and complete the life. It is the man of faith whose vision strikes through all disguises to the truth. He is too sane to deny that the pleasures of sin are real, but he knows, nevertheless, that they bring no permanent satisfaction—indeed, he knows quite well that sweet gratification turns quickly to bitter remorse. And Moses had just that faculty steadily to look at the sin beforehand from the standpoint of the experienced gratification, and understand that the pleasure could not last. He knew quite well that, while he could reach the goal on which his ambition was set, and the advantages and enjoyments it would procure for him would be real and substantial, his pleasure in them would always be poisoned by the thought that a higher call had come to him, and he had made the great and irretrievable refusal.

And if one had been disposed to condole with him for his sacrifice of wealth and honour he would not have accepted such



pity. He was conscious of possessing a greater wealth and honour in the reproach he had taken upon him than in all the treasures of Egypt. The writer could not help seeing in it the presence of the same spiritual quality which found its supreme manifestation in the Cross of Christ, so he even speaks of it as the reproach of Christ, and in so doing reminds his readers that the Cross whose scandal they felt so keenly had played its part in the career of Moses their honoured leader. In the sense of God's approval and that of his own conscience, in the realisation of the deliverance he was to achieve for his people he found greater riches than all the treasures in Egypt. I am reminded of the great passage at the close of "Romola." I will quote only two sentences from that tremendous book: "It is only a poor sort of happiness that could ever come by caring very much about our own narrow pleasures. We can only have the highest happiness, such as goes along with being a great man, by having wide thoughts and much feeling for the rest of the world as well as ourselves ; and this sort of happiness

often brings so much pain with it that we can only tell it from pain by its being what we would choose before everything else, because our souls see it is good."

But when the writer tells us "he looked unto the recompense of reward," he seems to spoil what has gone before. Our impulse is at once to retort, "Oh, then, Moses was self-seeking after all, only he made much cleverer calculations than other people would have done. Faith was just the cooler, keener insight which enabled him to make a better bargain than his fellows. He was good because it paid him better." The writer of the Epistle does not, it is true, tell us precisely what he had in mind, but we can, at any rate, rest assured that we should wrong Moses himself by such a criticism. For what we may call the higher doctrine of the future life emerged in the religion of Israel at a comparatively late period, and therefore the founder of the religion may reasonably be regarded as untouched by this as regards motive. So far as he was concerned he did his duty and made his sacrifice without thought of reward in that sense. If, then,

we give a meaning to the author's words which shall harmonise with history, we shall speak of Moses as contemplating a reward only in the sense in which we speak of virtue as its own reward. He had peace of conscience and the assurance that, at all costs, he had followed the path of duty. He had the privilege of knowing that his sacrifice had meant the redemption of his people. Above all, he was happy in the sense of God's approval. We may all desire that our own actions may be prompted by such disinterested anticipations of reward.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE DISCIPLINE OF INACTION

WHEN Moses had reached his great resolve to renounce his position and his prospects at the court of Pharaoh and cast in his lot with his people, he proceeded at once to translate his choice into action. He went out to discover how his brethren fared, and seeing one of them oppressed by an Egyptian, he slew the aggressor and hid him in the sand. On the following day he saw one Hebrew ill-treating another, and rebuked him for the wrong that he did, appealing to the tie of brotherhood between him who did and him who suffered the wrong.

His well-meant intervention was met with a scornful refusal to recognise his title to interfere, and a reference to the slaying of the Egyptian, which Moses imagined to be unknown. The Hebrew, we may well be-

lieve, would not otherwise have dared thus to answer him. There is no reason to suppose that he was aware of Moses' resolve. To him he would still hold his former position as a grandee of Egypt. But the man realised that Moses had, by the very act of slaying the Egyptian, delivered himself into his enemies' hand. Let them but come to hear of it, and his head would no longer be safe. So the Moses whom the day before he would have treated with servility he now defies with insolence, adding an ominous hint of the hold that he had upon him. The would-be redeemer was terrified at the prospect which opened before him. Subsequently we learn that the story came to Pharaoh's ears and that he sought to slay Moses, whereupon the latter fled from the king into Midian.

Accordingly, when the author tells us that he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, it is natural for the reader who remembers the original story to suppose that the reference must be to the Exodus, since otherwise he would not have said that Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king. I do not doubt, however, for reasons

which I have given elsewhere, that this interpretation is incorrect, and that, with the majority of commentators, we should refer the words of our author to the flight into Midian. The fear of Moses is not immediately connected with his flight in the Hebrew story, so that the author may have felt warranted by this in denying that the flight was due to fear. He affirms, on the contrary, that it was due to his faith. It is the very fact that the narrative suggested cowardice which made it impossible for the writer to ignore it. For fear is the contradiction of faith; and while the momentary terror beneath the blow of a sudden disclosure may be counted as of little moment, did it not seem a fiasco that these high resolves and this splendid renunciation should end in ignominious flight? To the author it was an intolerable thought that faith so rare as that which Moses had displayed, which had reached heights of self-renunciation so sublime, should be stultified by an escape from Egypt, prompted by a regard for his own life, that left his brothers in the lurch and abandoned them to their fate. Indeed, there

would have been a tragic discrepancy between so lofty an unselfishness and so cowardly a desertion. We must accordingly assume that the flight from Egypt meant no abandonment of his plan for his people's deliverance.

In what, then, it may be asked, did the faith of Moses consist? What special insight was displayed in running away from the work to which he had dedicated his life? In a word, we may reply that it was the recognition that God's time had not yet come. Now, a recognition of this kind did imply a somewhat surprising insight in a man of Moses' temperament. The slaying of the Egyptian shows us how impulsive that temperament was, how great his temptation to act first and reflect afterwards. It would not, therefore, have been surprising if, having begun with violence, he had gone forward on the same path, rousing his brethren to rebellion that by force he might snap the Egyptian yoke. It was regrettable that Moses should have been hurried away by his passionate indignation to meet violence with violence, but it was a mistaken impulse which may readily be pardoned. What is truly admirable

is, that having been swung off his balance by a momentary impulse, he recovered his poise so quickly and kept himself so sternly in hand.

What could he do after his blunder had been made? Only two alternatives were open to him, violence or flight. Except as leader of a rebellion Egypt had become an impossible place to him. And in some ways rebellion was very tempting. Conscious of his genius, feeling keenly the oppression of his brethren, he might well have thought that a desperate remedy might justly be tried for circumstances so desperate. Moreover, feeling assured of the righteousness of his cause, and of his own call to be his people's deliverer, he might also have felt that he could rely on God to crown his enterprise with success. So a man with a smaller faith might have argued, and reasoning in this way he might have been brought to a more congenial conclusion. No humiliating confession or even consciousness of his mistake in slaying the Egyptian would have been involved, no appearance of cowardice or inconsistency in leaving his people. But he



had the insight to see that God's hour had not yet struck, and therefore he resolutely turned his back on the course he had begun to tread, and retraced his steps till he entered on the harder way. For it was harder to live for his people than it was to die for them.

The insight of Moses was not any supernatural understanding of God's will apart from any indications of what that will was. In our own modern life the call that is made upon our powers of observation is so slight that we are habitually blind to very plain indications. We get our information in so much easier a way. The fascination of such stories as those of Sherlock Holmes depends very largely on the detective's faculty of minute and accurate observation combined with specialist knowledge and a great gift of logical deduction. But away from civilisation his exploits would produce much less astonishment. The Red Indian scout, or the pale-faced trapper, or the Australian black-fellow would follow a trail with an even greater keenness. Indications which a European would never see, which are so

slight that he would scarcely discern them when they were pointed out to him, would be observed as a matter of course by these dwellers in the wilds whose senses have been sharpened to an abnormal acuteness by stern necessity and constant peril. But they would be helpless if called upon to track a ghost trail where no physical signs of the spirit's passing were present. And this may illustrate the faith of Moses. He did not reach his conclusions by any leap of unaided intuition, but by keenly marking and faithfully following indications of God's will, which lay in the situation itself. What, then, were the tokens which faith enabled him to interpret aright? There were two signs, he and his people were alike unready.

Moses himself was not ready. This may surprise us. He had the genius for leadership, the knowledge of affairs, of Egypt's strength and also of its weakness. He had a lofty enthusiasm, a passionate love for his people, which had spurred him to a great renunciation, and cast all self-seeking out of his heart. He believed in himself as the child of destiny, in Israel as the people of

God. He was conscious that his surrender of luxury, prospects, and position had God's approval resting upon it. Moreover, he had come to years of maturity, and, therefore, his resolve was not the outcome of a generous but evanescent impulse. It was the fixed and steady resolve of a man of the world, who counts the cost, and does not recklessly plunge into a course of action of which he does not see the issue. When an enthusiasm captures a man of his age, it does not quickly expire for want of material to feed on through long years; the fuel has steadily been accumulating, and, once alight, it will burn for a prolonged period with intense and un-failing glow.

And yet, in spite of this, Moses was not ready. Noble enthusiasm was not enough even when it was added to all the wisdom of Egypt. It was not enough, for he who would be the leader of others must first have attained mastery of himself. And Moses had failed at the very outset. He had suffered his impulse to carry him away. He was at the mercy of the first gust of passionate indignation. He had repelled violence by

murder. It was a generous impulse, no doubt, which prompted his deed, but he ruined everything by his impetuosity, and long years were needed to repair the ruin. We do not know what might have happened had Moses taken the better way. Perhaps he might have secured his people's deliverance much earlier. But this raw and heady enthusiasm stamped him as unfit for his task. He could be fit for it only when to self-renunciation had been added self-mastery.

It is one of the hardest tasks of the reformer to learn how to be patient with wrong. It is part of the trust committed to him that he should take long views and act in the interest of the whole. And therefore he must not be hasty. He must school himself to be long-suffering with abuses that he feels to be intolerable and with wrongs inflicted on others which fire him with indignation. Everything must be subordinated to the ultimate triumph of the cause. This lesson Moses had not learnt. It did him honour that he was sensitive to the injustice inflicted on the individual. It would have been better had he remembered that this

was typical of many another instance which his people had daily to endure. Then he might have been patient and laid his plans deep, but because he was not patient he redressed the wrong of an individual and indefinitely postponed the deliverance of his race. It is much harder for a noble nature to endure the wrongs inflicted on others than those inflicted on itself, yet that lesson must be learnt by those who aspire to be the deliverers of a nation from bondage.

But Moses had another indication of the Divine will than the experience of his own unfitness, and this consisted in the fact that Israel was no more ready than he was. Only on the second day he met with an insolent rebuff from one of the Hebrews whom it was his purpose to deliver. It is by no means uncommon for the liberator to endow those whom he wishes to save with admirable qualities which they do not possess. A halo of romance gathers about the oppressed while he is far away from them, but closer knowledge reveals the unwelcome truth that they have their own odious vices. It is by no means impossible that Moses, to some extent, idealised his people.

In any case he expected a welcome from them. How bitter, then, was the disillusion which chilled all his lofty aspirations when he found that they resented the interest which he showed in them. It is not so difficult to make a sacrifice, but it is very hard to make it and then find that we have made it for those who are not worthy. In this indication, slight though it was, he saw another sign that it was not yet God's will that Israel should be released from bondage. So he left Egypt for Midian.

His new conditions must have struck him as in strange contrast with the old. From the full and rushing flood of Egyptian civilisation he passed at one bound to the solitude of the desert. Here there was no feverish excitement, no fierce and strenuous race for wealth or high position, but life reduced to its simplest terms. The prince becomes a shepherd, he who had aspired to be the saviour of men is entrusted with a flock of sheep. But how immeasurable was the gain which came to Moses. He was plucked out of the thick of those circumstances which had proved too strong for him, he was left alone with himself and his God. What now came to him

was the opportunity for meditation, for self-knowledge. His was not a shallow nature, and yet it needed to be deepened. He had to be driven in upon himself, he must have his own forty years in the wilderness before he was qualified to be the leader of Israel during its forty years' wandering. In this seclusion, away from the tumult and fret of the great cities, in constant fellowship with nature and communion with God, his inward life expanded, and powers, hitherto almost unexercised, were stimulated and developed. He saw the universe from fresh points of view, he corrected his former narrowness of outlook, and came to understand conditions which hitherto had been a secret to him.

One cannot help feeling that the attitude of Moses towards his people left something to be desired. He must have been conscious of the deep gulf which divided him from them; but perhaps the unconscious superiority of his tone was even more galling to them. It is not an uncommon blunder of the aristocrat who seeks to elevate the masses. In the desert he would grow gradually accustomed to a wholly new scale of values. Things which had seemed to

him of vital moment in the intense and crowded life of Egypt were dwarfed to their real proportions in the spacious leisure and unencumbered life of the wilderness.

As year passed away after year, the unchanging heavens mirrored in the unchanging earth, a wholly new sense would be borne in upon him of the abiding realities which are untouched by the shock of change. It was good for him to have had the best that civilisation and culture could offer him, but it was needful, also, that he should be qualified for his work by long, deep musing beneath the remote and silent stars. The highest type of deliverer is one whose community with his fellows is touched with aloofness, who handles the things of time with fingers trained to dexterity in the school of eternity. The mere saint is often impracticable in his handling of affairs, but the man who is wise with all the world's wisdom is far more efficient if he is also one of the children of light. It was not the desert which made Moses, it was the desert supervening on the life in Egypt.

The time of preparation seems disproportionate to the length of service. Ordinarily



it is thought sufficient if a quarter, or in some cases a third, of the total life is devoted to getting ready for the life work. But Moses had forty years in Egypt and forty in the wilderness that he might be prepared for the forty years' leadership of his people. When, however, we remember the task which was entrusted to him, that of redeeming a nation from bondage and creating the people of revelation, we shall perhaps acknowledge that the time of preparation was not out of proportion to the task he had to achieve.

If we look at the end of his training we shall be struck with the way in which his lesson had been learnt. The headstrong Moses, who set out to put the world right, with no lack of self-confidence and sustained by a soaring enthusiasm, has disappeared, and in his place we have the shrinking and diffident man, who dreads the call to action and is conscious beyond everything else of his own unfitness for the task. He has lived so long in solitude that he cannot bring himself to face the city and the court, he has been trained so long to silence in his seclusion that he has only stammering lips with which to plead the cause of

his people. And yet shall we not say that he was fitter in this mood for the work to which he was chosen? For while he was full of self-confidence he was not fitted to be the instrument of God. But now his nature has been tempered by the fires of discipline, and his overwhelming sense of helplessness and inefficiency have made him a pliant implement in the hands of God. So he was better prepared for his work in this humble and reluctant mood than when he slew the Egyptian and preached brotherhood to the violent Hebrew.

When the author tells us that he endured as seeing Him who is invisible, he means that, in spite of the danger which threatened from Pharaoh, Moses was not terrified, but was strong and courageous because his eye was fixed on God. There is an intentional contrast between the earthly and the heavenly king. The man who has seen Him who is invisible rises superior to the terrors which sap the courage of those to whom no such vision is granted. Isaiah saw the Lord on His throne, high and lifted up, therefore he was not over-awed by the king of Assyria.

Again and again the religious man has disdained martyrdom, he has braved the fiery furnace, or entered the torture-chamber with unfaltering step, because his soul has been fixed on Him who is the Disposer of life and death and the Source of supernatural strength. It is the very note of faith that it sees the invisible, that it does not count the things which appeal to the senses as the true realities, but fixes its hope and confidence in that realm of eternity where the real and the abiding are to be found. Such was the faith of Moses. From the perils of Egypt he turned with serene assurance to that unseen Controller of destiny to whom he committed himself and his cause.

But although the author refers in this phrase only to the flight of Moses, we cannot doubt that he would have considered the same principle to have been exemplified in Moses' life in the desert. Through all these years of inaction and meditation it was the same firm hold on spiritual realities which steadied and strengthened him. The weary years of inactivity and waiting were made not only tolerable, but fruitful by the faith which

gripped the changeless realities of the invisible order.

It may, indeed, seem a strange thing to us that the author passes by an incident so suggestive as that of the burning bush, for I certainly do not think that the suggestion is correct that the phrase he uses contains a reference to it. We are hardly to imagine that the burning bush was something which could have been seen only by the man of spiritual vision. We may rather suppose that the phenomenon had a physical basis, presumably electrical in character, and that it would have appeared to others as it appeared to Moses. Nor can we say, perhaps, that he showed an exceptional insight in that he detected the spiritual force behind the physical manifestation. It was curiosity which led him to investigate the strange appearance, and it was only when he received the command to put his shoes off his feet that he realised the place on which he stood to be holy ground. The revelation was rather vouchsafed to him than an acquisition of his faith, hence the author says nothing of it. Yet the visible manifestation fitly closed that long period of waiting in which

his soul had been strengthened by fellowship with the Unseen.

The case of Moses is one of singular instruction for ourselves. There is, first of all, the initial act of renunciation. This stood at the opening of his new life, and alone rendered it possible. He saw clearly that if he dedicated himself it must be without reserve, that he could not keep one foot in the camp of Egypt and the other in the camp of Israel. This in itself conveys to us a most salutary lesson, for nothing is more common than to find those, the note of whose whole life is compromise, who stultify themselves and doom their work to be ineffective by their attitude of semi-surrender. Their heart is in the world from which they are fleeing as the heart of Lot's wife was in Sodom. Like the Laodiceans, they are neither cold nor hot, and with divided interests never achieve anything worthy of their powers. Here the bold policy is in all respects the best. The timid bather who lingers shivering on the brink is a pathetic, or if one changes the point of view, a humorous spectacle. Having chosen one's course, to make the decisive plunge, that is the way

to secure a mind at unity with itself and the concentration of our energies on a single aim.

Yet we must remember that this is not a complete account of the Christian's experience. The act of renunciation should stand at the opening of the way, an act decisive and made once for all, sharp and definite and complete. But it is also true that the cross goes with us through the whole of our pilgrimage ; we die daily, and always bear about with us the dying of Jesus. That is the paradox of our life, that continually we are tempted to be unfaithful to our earliest vows, and therefore that the absolute surrender may be nullified by the backward glance towards Sodom or the hankering after the flesh-pots of Egypt. No doubt the temptation came to Moses himself to be faithless to his first resolves. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that he succumbed to it. His reluctance to accept the mission had other roots than that, else the mission would never have been entrusted to him.

Once more, like Moses we may have to endure the discipline of disillusion. We start, it may be, not only with lofty aspirations, but

with generous thoughts both of those with whom we would work and those whom we desire to help. But a rebuff comes to us, it may be from those whose co-operation ought to have been loyally accorded, or it may be from those for whom our renunciation had been made. Conscious, it may be, of the purity of our own motives, it bewilders us to find that we are not taken at our own valuation and that no enthusiastic welcome greets our accession to the ranks. We are chilled and disappointed, and in the cold, hard light all the repellent qualities of our task, which had been softened or perhaps transfigured by the glow of our enthusiasm, stand out in gaunt distinctness. Thus at the very outset our heroic dream is rudely shattered. The poetry and romance have departed from our enterprise; our eyes are no longer bewitched by glamour—they have awakened to the prosaic reality.

This discipline of disillusion, distasteful though it may be, is most salutary for us. It jars on all our sensibilities, perhaps we even reel from it as if we had received a blow, but it tests the reality of our devotion and answers



the question whether bruised vanity and wounded self-love are stronger than our enthusiasm for the cause. And it is well that we should learn fairly soon how disenchanting our task is likely to be, how often the response we shall elicit will make us sick at heart.

We may learn also from the case of Moses the vital importance of selecting our methods aright. We must not be unduly hurried and ruin everything by our impetuosity. Moses had no hesitation in consecrating himself to God's work, but he had to learn that God's work must be done in God's way and not in his own.

But the deepest lesson of the narrative is, that it may be necessary to make an even harder renunciation than that by which we surrender earthly privilege and advantage to accept the duty to which God has called us. When such a surrender has been made, the current of our life is turned into this new course, and all our energy and enthusiasm bear us onward towards the goal. And then, when we seem to have found our life-work and everything appears to go smoothly and swiftly forward, there comes a perplexing



change. Not, of course, in all cases. There are those who are suffered to carry out their programme, and achieve without interruption the task to which they have dedicated their powers. But there are many cases where it is otherwise. Sometimes the interruption may occur at one point, sometimes at another. Perhaps the work may be well advanced, possibly it may be but barely begun. In the case of Moses the check came at the very threshold of his enterprise. But whenever it comes, it taxes our faith as scarcely anything else can do. For the experience seems to imply an inconsistency on the part of God. It is as though caprice controlled His action, leading Him at one moment to issue His orders, and the next moment to cancel them. We can understand the discipline of affliction, but the discipline of inaction presents us with a harder problem—all the more when we are acutely conscious how great is the harvest and the labourers how few. When we realise the world's urgent need and the utter inadequacy of the forces available to cope with it, when it seems as though not even the humblest could be spared, why, we ask, should

God thwart Himself by dooming to inactivity one who would gladly be spent to the uttermost in His service? Moses was condemned to inactivity for forty years, and the heroism and insight of his faith are apparent in nothing so conspicuously as in his ready acquiescence in his enforced inactivity, because he realised it to be the will of God.

Are we, then, to say that he was mistaken in his belief that he was called to renounce his position as the son of Pharaoh's daughter? By no means. The deliverance of his people was his ultimate destiny, and the surrender of Egypt's honours was a necessary first step to the accomplishment of that purpose. Moreover, apart from it the subsequent experience would have been impossible. Had he not consecrated his life to this service there could have been no discipline in the enforced abandonment of his task. We are not therefore to argue, when a perplexing experience of this kind occurs to us, that God is acting capriciously or we ourselves have necessarily mistaken His call. The voice of the Church may call us to a certain position, and we may accept it as the will of God.

It does not follow, if some insuperable obstacle is placed in our way, that the Church has made a mistake in calling us or we in accepting the call. The significance and the value of the experience lie just in the fact that we are right. It is the paradox which strains our faith and tests its quality. We are ready to do great things for God, but it is a still greater achievement of faith to be ready, if it should be His will, to do nothing for Him except to wait. It is a rare faith which under that trial keeps the soul serene and saves it from chafing against the restrictions which prohibit the fulfilment of our deepest desires. There are some considerations that may help us to attain such faith.

In the first place, we need to take both long and comprehensive views. It is quite natural that we should judge in a very short-sighted way. A situation while we are passing through it bulks in our thoughts to a degree altogether out of proportion to its intrinsic importance. We need to correct this by considering life as a whole, not limiting our outlook to the crisis through which we may be passing, but consoling our-

selves by the assurance that when our life is complete, this may be seen to fall into its proper place, and to have given us just that element which was needed to round it into a perfect whole.

But there is something far more important to remember even than this—namely, that time is not our measure. It is a preparation for a vaster service, and the very fact of inaction here may mean that we are being prepared for a loftier activity there. And similarly we must take a comprehensive view. We must look at our function in the light of the whole. We are but humble soldiers who are fitted into our place in the Leader's designs, and therefore, whether it is action or inaction to which He calls us, we must cheerfully accept it as fitting best His great strategic plan. I need hardly add the caution that this principle is to be made no excuse for laziness. It is not voluntary but enforced inactivity of which I am speaking.

Again, this experience may be needful for our own soul's good. It is very hard for us rightly to apprehend our own insignificance. We are the centre of our own universe too

often, and we cannot help feeling how necessary we are. It is our peculiar temptation if we are placed in positions of responsibility where our withdrawal might really seem to spell disaster. We may perhaps first be schooled by warnings. Our activities may be curbed on this side and that. If we take these warnings aright, the main stream of our life will perhaps be suffered to go on unchecked. If not, there may come a more drastic experience, by which we are sharply taught that no man is indispensable to God. But this may be turned into the best of all blessings if we meet it in the right way. Deeds of heroism strain us far less than periods of tedious waiting, and they demand a far less lofty faith.

Lastly, let us not forget the lesson which this chapter has previously taught us, that what the world judges as ignominious failure may prove to be the highest success. The high hopes of Moses seemed to crumble at once into irretrievable ruin, his flight appeared to be the disgraceful abandonment of his cause. Yet because he knew that it was God's will that he should leave Egypt, he

braved the scorn which his conduct might naturally excite, and accepted with unshaken trust in God the postponement of his dearest desires. But by this path alone came the ultimate achievement of his purpose. So it has been in many lives, so in the supreme fact of the world's history. The flight of Moses meant the salvation of Israel, the failure of Calvary meant the salvation of the world.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE ANGEL OF DEATH

THE author passes by the incidents of Moses' career which followed his flight, and does not take up the tale again till he reaches the eve of the Exodus. The long forty years of Moses' waiting, his reluctant acceptance of the call when at last it came, the wonderful signs he wrought before Pharaoh, the plagues by which he enforced his demand for Israel's release—of these we hear nothing except the reference to the final plague. And this is subordinate to the institution of the Passover. It is still a matter of dispute how we should interpret this rite. It is by no means improbable that it was not altogether novel. We find parallels in other parts of the world where blood is sprinkled on the door to ward off the pestilence. Perhaps also we

should accept the suggestion made by Trumbull that the term refers to God's passing over the threshold into the homes of the Israelites, and making a blood-covenant with them.

It is a widely spread custom which still survives in the East to shed blood on the threshold over which a guest is to pass. He steps over the threshold, taking care not to tread upon it, since to trample the blood under foot would mean that he rejected the covenant with insult. There are other suggestions in the Old Testament of the sacredness of the threshold, and there are parallels to it in the history of other peoples. Thus when the Roman bride was taken to her husband's home she was carried across the threshold. Obviously this was intended to prevent the accident of her treading on the threshold, which would have cast a slur on the marriage covenant. If this is so, the thought of the passage is that, while the destroying angel enters into the homes of those who have prepared no welcome for Yahweh, where the blood is sprinkled on the door God passes over the threshold as a welcomed guest, and



makes a covenant with the inmates of the house.

The faith of Moses is displayed in his recognition that God's threat of destruction against the first-born would be accomplished, and that the sprinkling of the blood would ensure the protection of Israel. The incident is thus parallel, partly to that of Noah's building of the ark, partly to the sacrifice of Abel. Noah also was convinced of an impending destruction, and took the way of deliverance pointed out to him by God. On the other hand, the thought that the shedding of blood was well-pleasing to God not only plays a part in his earlier argument, but has already met us as a principle which differentiated the sacrifice of Abel from that of Cain.

The whole story of the last plague is one of heartrending pathos. The narrator, whose patriotic sympathies were engaged for the Hebrews against Egypt, probably did not feel it as we feel it. He is by no means blind to the colossal character of the disaster, unprecedented and never to be repeated, so unique in the misery and the terror it pro-

voked. But we, with our humaner feelings, and looking back on the incidents in a more detached way, realise, as the writer of the narrative in Exodus did not, the tragedy in all the horror and agony of it. For we, as our imagination takes us back, individualise where he generalised, and think with pity of the homes with their happiness blighted at a stroke by the pitiless Angel of Death. It is an appalling lesson in the doctrine of solidarity, when we see the suffering of a whole people for the defiant obstinacy of its ruler. Were the author of the Epistle writing in our own day he might have added, "By faith we view the undeserved calamities of mankind, and hold fast our belief in the goodness of God."

It lies beyond my present purpose to trace the later history of the Passover, and show how a rite of protection was transformed into a memorial feast, or to discuss the relation of the Passover to the death of Christ. Both Paul and John saw in Christ the Paschal victim. But it would be unhistorical to read back this idea into the mind of Moses. I pass on, accordingly, to the next scene, where

also the Egyptians were smitten by the Angel of Death while Israël was delivered. The Hebrews had left the land of bondage behind them and entered the wilderness. Pharaoh had recovered from his terror, and resolved that the Hebrews should not escape him. Accordingly he got together an army and went after them. The plight of the Hebrews seemed to be desperate, for the sea barred their way in front, there was no escape for them on the right hand or the left, and they were themselves the victims of panic.

It was not their own faith which procured their deliverance. Moses had to bear the whole burden of rallying them from their despair, and reviving their trust in the leadership of God. He bade them stand still and see the salvation of God. There was nothing else for them to do. Caught at a disadvantage, they could not flee, and what match were they for the disciplined warriors of Pharaoh? It is needless to recall the familiar story any further, still more to discuss the questions that it raises. The Israelites pass through the sea, which for them turned into dry land. The

Egyptians tried the dry land on which the Hebrews walked, and for them it was turned into sea.

Here the faith of Moses reminds us of that displayed by Abraham when the command came to him to offer up Isaac. In both cases an impossible situation seemed to be created. It looked as though the way along which God had been leading the course of events was suddenly blocked. But in both cases faith rose triumphant over the temptation to despair. Abraham was assured that the heir of the promise could not perish without a successor to whom the inheritance might be handed on; while Moses was confident that all the long preparation through which he had himself passed, and the promises of God that Israel should be delivered, would not thus be brought to nought. There was nothing more that he could do, so he confidently cast the responsibility for deliverance upon God. And God honoured his faith by setting in work the forces of nature to ensure the safety of the Hebrews. The main lesson of the incident for us is summed up in the proverb, "Man's extremity is God's

opportunity." On this I have previously spoken, and therefore need not repeat what I have already said.

The author does not touch at all on the story of the wilderness wanderings, on the experiences at Sinai, or on any of the later incidents of Moses' career. He makes no reference to the crossing of the Jordan, but takes up the story again with the destruction of Jericho and the preservation of Rahab. In the former story he sees an example of obedience to an apparently irrational command. The Hebrews would naturally have attempted to carry the city by assault, but the story narrated how they went in procession about it for seven days, and how the walls succumbed to this spectacular display and the triumphant shouts of the Israelites. Once more it would be irrelevant to discuss the problems which the narrative raises for us, but of which our author would be unconscious. The lesson he would impress upon us is that faith is displayed in implicit obedience to the command of God, though it should be out of harmony with all our preconceived ideas.

One more instance of salvation from death is brought before us. Rahab hid the spies and saved them from those who would have slain them, because she had faith to discern in the wonderful history of Israel the pre-eminence of the God of Israel, and to draw the inference that Canaan was destined to be the possession of the Hebrews. Strong in this conviction, she braved the perils of detection, and took sides against her own doomed country. This attitude might seem to be blameworthy were it not that she recognised a higher allegiance to be demanded from her than that even to her own city and people. Moreover, they had just the same means of forming a judgment as she possessed. They, too, had known of Israel's deliverance. So when the doom fell on the city, while all the inhabitants were given up to the ban of extermination, and only its gold and silver and vessels of brass and iron were saved from the flames for the treasury of the sanctuary, the faith of Rahab was rewarded, not only by her own preservation, but by the preservation of all her family from death. It is remarkable in how many cases in this chapter the

same point is emphasised that faith preserves from death. It is so with Enoch, with Noah, with Isaac, with the Hebrews in Egypt and at the Red Sea. It is a point which the author touches again more than once in the summary which follows.

## CHAPTER XIII

### FAITH ON THE BATTLE-FIELD

THUS far the march of the writer's eloquence has brought before us one illustrious example of faith after another. But now, as his eye ranges down the history of the Hebrews in Canaan, the ranks of faith's heroes seem to become denser ; they get upon his imagination, and his stately rhetoric catches fire. The champions grow more multitudinous as his eye swiftly passes over the centuries, and he realises that he cannot treat the rest of the history upon the same scale. He begins to mention names, but passes from these to the prophets, and then proceeds to touch in rapid but vivid phrases the exploits faith's champions accomplished and the sufferings which faith's martyrs, with an even nobler heroism, endured. As we think of Israel's splendid history we do not wonder that he felt himself over-



whelmed by the abundance of his material. His glance moves rapidly from the Hebrew conquest of Canaan to the times of the Maccabees, and he is conscious of scenes that rise before him which would have filled a space many times greater than that which he had already devoted to their predecessors. One is tempted to wish that he had continued in the same strain a little longer, to have touched with his intimate sympathy and power of expression some of the outstanding incidents in the later history. We could have wished that, instead of the bare catalogue of names, he had devoted a special description to each, and that some of the prophets had been selected for special description ; but we must take what we find, and be thankful that this rapid sketch is written with such burning, inspiring eloquence.

The author selects four of the Judges for special mention—Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah. No difficulty can be felt about Gideon's presence in the list. His whole conduct of the campaign against the Midianites reveals his faith. Perhaps in the request for the double sign we may detect a slight flaw in

it, as if he must make assurance doubly sure, but in other respects he was the most conspicuous example of faith among the Judges. This was shown in his permission to all who were faint-hearted to go home, though this might be commended even on grounds of policy, since it is disastrous for the ranks to be honey-combed with centres of panic. But the readiness with which he reduced his army to three hundred at the bidding of God revealed a faith equal to a strain of no ordinary kind.

Barak was inferior in this quality to Gideon. When he receives God's message from the lips of Deborah he makes his obedience conditional on Deborah's presence with him. Only if she will accompany him to his conflict with Sisera will he venture to confront so powerful a commander in battle. Deborah went with him, and gave him the signal for attack ; and, since he gained a great victory against terrible odds, the writer includes him among his heroes. Deborah herself might more fitly have stood here, but she took no part in the actual fighting.

Perhaps the most unexpected feature is the

presence of Samson in such company, for Samson's attacks upon the Philistines were almost entirely provoked by personal reasons. He was petulant and vindictive; his action was determined not, as in the case of the other Judges, by the desire to deliver Israel from the oppressor, but to avenge wrongs inflicted upon himself. Presumably the author felt that, as a champion who did as a matter of fact perform exploits against the Philistines, he might include him in this summary mention. The story of Samson is a most instructive ethical study, but it would be out of place to touch upon this here.

A more tragic interest gathers about Jephthah, the rough and ruthless warrior but tender-hearted father, who purchased victory at a price more terrible than he anticipated. To the modern reader Jephthah's vow seems a piece of dark superstition, but it was in harmony with the thought of the time. The help of Heaven in battle was not always something to be taken for granted—a heavy price might be demanded for it. Thus, when Saul was pursuing the Philistines, he pronounced a curse on any who might touch food till the sun

had gone down. I expect that the modern reader usually imagines that Saul's intention was to avoid the delay which might be occasioned by their stopping to take food. But, really, his action seems to have been dictated by the same principle which governed that of Jephthah : by the taboo which he pronounces he wins supernatural power and victory over his foes. Jonathan criticises his father's conduct from what would be our own common-sense standpoint. His own eyes were enlightened by tasting the honey in the wood, and, similarly, the faintness of the people would have passed away, and they would have inflicted far worse defeat upon the Philistines. For that age, however, Jonathan's criticism would seem rationalistic, and Saul's prohibition of food would have been thought abundantly worth while since, according to the ideas of the time, the physical weakening of his soldiers would be more than compensated by the help of the supernatural powers.

And, similarly, Jephthah has in mind the securing of a decisive victory at a high price. For it is a human sacrifice that he intends by his vow, though certainly he did not anticipate

that his daughter would be the victim. Are we then to say that our author was mistaken when he instanced Jephthah's victory as an example of the power of faith? From his own enlightened standpoint, as from ours, it would be regarded as superstition; but this is one of those cases where the defect in the faith is primarily intellectual. He made his vow according to his light; and we are accepted according to what we have, not according to what we have not. It is a lesson which we often need to remember that God graciously condescends to our infirmity, takes us where He finds us, and deals with us by methods and judges us by standards adapted to us.

It surprises us less to find David mentioned in this connexion. He came as the fit climax of Israel's earlier warriors, consolidating the kingdom, throwing off the Philistine yoke, making Jerusalem the capital of his kingdom and winning an empire to which later generations looked back with wistful enthusiasm. And his brilliance as general and statesman was not simply joined to a singularly attractive character, but to a deeply earnest religious

nature. No doubt the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews assigned to him a far greater number of Psalms than would be attributed to him even by a moderate modern critic. And this makes us wish that he had spoken of his faith as illustrated by these compositions. But even if we take the story in the historical books, there are several points that he might have touched, especially one might name the simple but lofty faith in which he confidently went to meet Goliath, or his sending back the ark to Jerusalem when he was in flight from Absalom.

The author deserts the chronological order and mentions Samuel after David, since Samuel united in himself the qualities both of Judge and Prophet and therefore formed the fit transition from the warriors whom he has mentioned to the prophets. Most readers of the Old Testament who have been fascinated by the beautiful story of Samuel's birth and childhood must have wished that the compiler of the Books of Samuel had preserved more information about him. But the story breaks off, and when we meet with Samuel again he is already advanced in years. What

points the author would have selected for mention had he entered into detail we do not know.

At first sight the story of his call naturally strikes us. He hears the heavenly voice which does not come to others. Still he does not understand his experience till it is interpreted for him by Eli. The main significance he has for Hebrew history lies in his recognition of the fact that the time was ripe for the institution of the monarchy, and in passing this judgment we must not permit ourselves to be unduly swayed by the hostility to the idea attributed to him. His spiritual insight is also displayed in his clear and ringing enunciation of the great principle which ran counter to the current of ancient thought on religion even in Israel, that to obey was better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams. To us this principle has become so much a matter of course that we do not readily appreciate the grasp of deep spiritual truth which it implies. Religion in antiquity was so penetrated by materialism, the offering of sacrifice without regard to moral conditions, the belief in its magical efficacy as an instrument for

constraining Heaven to do the will of man, that it required an unusually keen penetration to see what, in the light of the teaching given by Samuel's greater successors and the New Testament, appears to us the veriest commonplace.



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE FAITH OF THE PROPHETS

FROM Samuel the author passes to the Prophets, mentioning them only in a word. Here especially we feel how large was the scope of what he might have said on this theme. The Prophets are pre-eminent in the religion of Israel, its most characteristic creation, a race of spiritual heroes in whom faith attained some of its most daring and dazzling achievements. Looking at the description which follows, the author's own thought of their faith seems to be concentrated mainly on heroism in conflict and endurance under persecution. And some examples of these qualities receive explicit mention, but there are others to which reference might also be made. Moreover, the faith of the Prophets was not limited either to their courage or to

their endurance. If, however, we think of these qualities in the first instance there is much that calls for mention.

We are reminded of the boldness with which they confronted kings and high officials, of Nathan's rebuke to David, or how Elijah denounced Ahab to his face. We remember how Amos, at the king's sanctuary, drew upon himself the wrath of the chief priest and exposed himself to a charge of treason because he dared to predict the inevitable punishment of Israel's sin. Similarly Isaiah, that regal spirit, warned Ahaz not to fling away the freedom of his country in order to secure relief from a temporary embarrassment, and, when the king refused the proffered sign, was angered by his hypocrisy. And even more remarkable was the courage of Jeremiah, for his was by nature a shrinking and timid spirit, and he had to confront an opposition far more venomous and embittered than that which was arrayed against Isaiah. Yet in the strength of his faith he subdued nature, casting himself upon God, who had at the first promised him that his foes should not prevail against him.

And it is very interesting to observe how both Elijah and Jeremiah suffered from reaction and were victims of despondency. Elijah at Horeb, Jeremiah at many a moment in his long warfare, move the reader to a profound sympathy and fill him with deeper admiration of the men who could rise above their limitations to such heights of courage. And there is another prophet who ought not to be forgotten in this connexion—Micaiah, the son of Imlah. It is but in a brief flash that we see him, but how vividly he stands before us! Ahab has had experience of him in the past, and how splendid is the testimonial which he unconsciously gives him: "I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil"! Amid the four hundred courtier prophets who prophesied in the name of Yahweh he stands like a faithful Abdiel, whose motto is, "As Yahweh liveth, what Yahweh saith unto me, that will I speak." In no ambiguous language he foretells the death of the king, and Ahab commits him to prison till he returns in peace. But Micaiah's assurance that he would not return in peace was justified by the event, for he

was brought back dead. Thus Micaiah exhibits both the qualities of which I have spoken. He is bold to utter the unwelcome word, prepared also to suffer affliction for the truth.

But we ought not to forget how singularly the Prophets illustrate the fundamental conception of faith—that of spiritual insight. Partly, of course, this is displayed in their predictions of the future. They know themselves to be the recipients of God's secrets. When some great event is impending it is they who have heard what God is about to accomplish. "Truly," Amos says, "the Lord Yahweh doeth nothing, but He revealeth His secret to His servants, the prophets." They are in communication with the spiritual world, they have their fingers on the pulse of history, they see visions withheld from the common man, and hear voices too fine for the less sensitive ears of their fellows.

Elijah shuts up heaven by his faith, and agonises in prayer that the unaccustomed rain may descend. He divines from the cloud no larger than a man's hand that there is

the sound of abundance of rain. His faith compels the heavenly fire to consume his offering and establish the sole right of Yahweh to the allegiance of His people. He knows the time and manner of his departure, and on what condition Elisha may become his heir. It was a fitting condition. Had Elisha been endowed only with ordinary human vision, he could have seen no chariots or horses of fire bearing his master heavenward through the air. But the fact that his inward eye was thus unsealed to behold this spiritual event stamped him as his master's worthy successor, endowed like himself with the gift of spiritual insight.

The same faculty is displayed in the most instructive story of the way in which Elisha allayed the fears of his servant when they were surrounded at Dothan by the horses and chariots of Syria. When the servant's eyes were opened he saw that the whole mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. In virtue of his clairvoyant gift Elisha follows Gehazi in spirit when he seeks by falsehood a present from

Naaman. He foretells the end of the famine, and the victories of Joash over Syria. Such, indeed, was his fame that he was credited by the Syrians with revealing to the king of Israel the word spoken by their own king in his bedchamber.

And this same faculty, though in a greater way, is displayed in the chief canonical prophets. It is true that they also utter the doom of individuals—Amos that of Amaziah, Jeremiah that of Hananiah. But their work is now done on a larger scale, since the great empire of Assyria becomes the dominating factor in the politics of Israel. The prophetic gift of Amos is manifested in his clear perception that the lethargy of Assyria is about to pass away, and that judgment will through that empire soon be inflicted upon Israel. Apparently no one but he had as yet awakened to the terrible fate which within a generation would overtake the faithless people. But he was greater than this would indicate. It is not his confident prediction which is his title to eminence, but rather his grasp of the principles on which the prediction was based. It was his profound conviction

that the world was governed by a righteous God which inspired his certainty that Israel's sin would lead to its annihilation. With him prophecy is no magical, but a moral and spiritual, phenomenon. He has grasped the great truth that righteousness and justice are the principles on which Heaven governs not Israel only, but the world. For him Yahweh is no mere national God. It is true that He has chosen Israel alone of the nations of the earth, but this implies a stricter reckoning with its sin. And yet He does not fall into the other extreme, and permit the nations to escape because they had not been privileged to receive the peculiar advantages of Israel. They, too, had consciously transgressed the universal laws, and for these outrages on our common humanity stern retribution will be exacted.

There is no need to tell again the pitiful story of Hosea. But what it is important for us to observe in this connexion is the wonderful insight which he displayed in its interpretation. For his was no exceptional case ; as he looked about him he saw many another example. But he was singular in

this, that he penetrated the meaning of his experience and thus rose even above his great predecessor, the preacher of righteousness, and for the first time uttered the glad tidings of the love of God. And thus what from one point of view seems but a mean and squalid tragedy redeemed by a deathless human love, becomes for us a window by which we may look into the very heart of God. And he breathes the spirit of love and tender compassion, utters this plea for repentance, this message of free forgiveness without relaxing for one moment the inflexibility of his moral demand. It is the danger of some that they debase the ethical currency by too exclusive a stress upon the tenderer side of truth, and they need to learn how stringent and inexorable are the conditions under which we live. Ours is a universe not ruled by a weak good nature which is swayed by gusts of sentiment; it is a stern and exacting order in which we have been placed. And the greatness of Hosea is seen in this, that while he proclaims with such deep emotion and such conviction the love and graciousness of God, he is not blinded by



his tears, but sees life steadily and sees it whole.

Isaiah also was a conspicuous example of faith in the sense that he was a man of deep spiritual insight. It is characteristic of him that his call to the prophetic office came to him in the form of a vision of God, the narrative of which is made all the more wonderful by its singular reticence. He is too reverent to give any description of God's appearance, and we gain our impression of His majesty and holiness only through a description of the demeanour of the seraphim in His presence, and through the overwhelming effect it had on Isaiah himself. The sight of God stabs him with a wholly new sense of his sin and the sin of his people. And yet not every man would have felt as he felt. The awe which possessed him, the thrill of dread, the foreboding of death which shook him to the bases of his being in unison with the threshold which he felt quivering to its foundations beneath his feet—these it needed a man of rare and fine spirit to experience. If the ray of the divine holiness searched him to his inmost

soul and disclosed, with its new and vivid light, all his failure and his sin, it was because he was sensitive to its action, and interposed no insuperable barrier to it. It is a man of natural religious genius who is selected as the fit vehicle for revelation. And then, after he is cleansed what faith he displays in the acceptance of his vocation ! He volunteers for the service, not even knowing what his mission is to be. Nor is he dismayed or turned back from his task by the discouraging disclosure that his work will result in hardening his people against the truth. Through forty long years he remained bravely at his post, all the while with a certainty of failure possessing him. Such is the heroism of his faith. Not that he reaches this height in the sublime moment of his vision, but that he maintains it without faltering through so long a period in face of a response so disheartening.

I have spoken already of the courage with which Isaiah confronted Ahaz ; but his faith came out here also in his firm grip of spiritual realities. The crisis from which Ahaz was seeking to extricate himself seemed to be

one that might justly try the nerves and make the heart quail. It was not wonderful that the short-sighted king should seek escape by becoming tributary to Assyria ; but Isaiah dissuaded him from this fatal step by the assurance that, if he would trust in God, he would certainly be delivered. So certain is he that he offers him a sign by which he may assure the unbelieving king. His faith rises to such a height of daring that he gives him his choice, ranging from heaven above to Sheol beneath. He utters the stern warning, "If you will not believe you shall not be established," indicating in this aphorism that his own life was consciously guided by the principle of faith. And then he rebukes the king's disbelief by the example of some nameless mother who, by the name Immanuel, shall indicate her own conviction that, though the foe is at the gates, God is still with His people.

It is the same faith which gives him the assurance that Jerusalem will not be captured by Sennacherib, but that disaster will overtake the Assyrian host. And his faith here was the more remarkable in that it was so

contrary to ordinary human calculation. In the counsel he had given to Ahaz in the earlier crisis political sagacity would have endorsed his estimate of the situation. He contemptuously calls the two kings who are allied against Judah fag-ends of smoking fire-brands ; in other words, they are burnt out and can do no real mischief ; the utmost they can do is to cause annoyance by their smoke. And when we consider that Jerusalem was naturally so strong, so admirably adapted to stand a siege ; when we remember, further, that the basis of the confederacy which was attacking it was hostility to Assyria, we can see that even worldly wisdom would have suggested that Ahaz's best plan was to remain quiet, since in her own interests Assyria would be compelled to intervene. But it was quite another matter when the mighty empire of Assyria was the foe, when all the cities of Judah save Jerusalem were in Sennacherib's hands, when an enormous host of captives had been taken and the wealth of the country had been depleted by an almost incredible indemnity, still to maintain the unruffled certainty of his faith, while the

scornful Rabshakeh taunted the rulers with their impotence and uttered to the populace plausible invitations to surrender. In that darkest hour when the king and people alike considered their cause to be destroyed, Isaiah maintained without flinching his faith in the city's deliverance. It is needless to recall how splendidly that faith was vindicated.

With Jeremiah we reach the high-water mark of Hebrew prophecy, and naturally look to him for an eminent manifestation of faith. First of all, he has the insight to see God in the commonplace, and to detect the significance of what may seem homely and trivial. The vision of the almond rod which is the harbinger of the spring, since that tree is the first to wake from the sleep of winter, assures him that, in spite of His apparent apathy, God is alert and wakeful, and will quickly perform His word. The vision of the seething pot with the fire below it fed from the north side is a presage to him of the trouble which is to break upon Judah from the north.

Again and again through his career he

was discredited by the apparent failure of his prophecies and exposed to the incredulity of his people. Yet he maintained his conviction of their truth, sustained by his faith that God's word could not fail. And he was especially great in the unique emphasis he laid on the inwardness of religion. The language in which he speaks of the heart is especially significant in this connexion. And it is just this quality which gives him his affinity with Christian writers. He grasped the distinction between the material and the immaterial in a way which reminds us of the author of our Epistle, and of course this comes out especially in his doctrine of the New Covenant. In that great passage, where perhaps the Old Testament reaches its climax, he asserts the elimination of the older materialistic religion by one which is to be purely spiritual.

It is hard for us to realise the solitary height on which he stood in a world that could not conceive religion without material embodiment, and which even yet, in spite of all these centuries of Christianity, fails fully to understand it. It is not strange

that our Lord and the Apostle Paul found in the New Covenant the most adequate description of Christianity, nor can we be surprised that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews should build so much of his great argument on this supreme passage. While the prophet's heart was wrung by the tragedies in which his country was involved, made all the more tragic by the blind optimism that refused to face the unwelcome facts, he could yet maintain his confidence in the survival of the true religion, unbroken by the destruction of the Temple and the city, the break-up of the kingdom, and the exile to Babylon. For he had come to see that the essence of religion could not be bound up with a material structure, not even with a city or with a land. Hence, while his countrymen were in despair at the thought that their religion was abolished by the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, he maintained his serene assurance that nothing which was vital had been touched. Thus he becomes a lesson to ourselves, of special value to us in periods of unsettlement.



We are too apt to regard our religion as bound up with the familiar forms in which it comes to us by tradition. When these are touched there is a danger that we too hastily conclude that Christianity has been struck in a vital place. It is very necessary for us carefully to distinguish between the accidents and the essentials of the Gospel. The remembrance of this would have saved many disastrous utterances in the past, and many quite needless forebodings.

When we pass from Jeremiah to Ezekiel we seem to be in a different atmosphere, and the Christian is conscious of a fall in the spiritual temperature. It is, of course, necessary for us to remember that the work done by Ezekiel for his own age was of vital importance for the future of religion. It is perhaps to him more than to any man that we owe the preservation of Israel's religion for the world. And he too, in his order, was a man of faith. Like Isaiah, his call comes to him in a vision of God which fills him with a crushing sense of the divine glory and the weakness and wickedness of man.



Like Jeremiah, he is assured of the moral principles by which the world is governed, and predicts like him, without faltering, the destruction of Jerusalem and the downfall of the Jewish State. And yet he had faith in the restoration and rebuked the despair of his people by his wonderful vision of the valley of dry bones, assuring them that the nation, which seemed utterly dead, would be called back to life and restored to its own land. There Yahweh would dwell in the midst of His renewed and regenerate people, and a new era of blessedness would be its portion. And, like Jeremiah, he emphasises the inwardness of religion in his great prophecy of the new heart.

In another respect he shows faith's capacity to pass behind appearances to reality. The seeming inequality of God's dealings with His people appeared to find only too much confirmation in the historical conditions. For, on the showing of the Prophets themselves, the sin of Israel had been accumulating for several generations, but it was upon Ezekiel's contemporaries that the punishment actually fell. The fathers had unquestionably eaten

sour grapes: was it fair for the children's teeth to be set on edge?

That Ezekiel's answer contains only part of the truth and that its deficiencies must be made good by other portions of the Old Testament is not to be denied. Yet Ezekiel defied appearances and affirmed that those who suffered merited the punishment which they received. It was the sour grapes they had themselves eaten which had set their teeth on edge. This faith in the equity of God which triumphed over appearances led him to formulate his great doctrine of individual responsibility which, although stated in an extreme form, nevertheless uttered a word of vital importance in correction of the widespread doctrine of solidarity which had previously prevailed.

The great unnamed prophet of the Exile, to whom we owe Isaiah xl.-lv., was placed, like Ezekiel, in a situation which severely strained his faith. The writer had probably not himself experienced the horrors of the siege and capture of Jerusalem and deportation to captivity, but his people were in exile, and when he wrote had been in captivity for forty

or fifty years. Their despairing cry went up that God had forgotten them, their claim to justice had passed out of His mind. Many had completely fallen away to idolatry, and it was hard even for those who were loyal to their own religion to hold their ground. For what did Yahweh seem to the world but a discredited deity, too weak to save His own people? It counted Him far inferior to the victorious gods of Babylon, the splendour of whose worship so far surpassed that of their own Temple in its palmiest days, a Temple which now lay in ruins. Thus they were crushed in abject despondency, nursing a futile hatred for their oppressors in their heart. But the great prophet was not dismayed by the apparently impregnable power of Babylon.

The first ground of his confidence is his certainty of Israel's God. The gods of the heathen are but dumb idols. It is not they who have given Israel to the spoiler; it is Yahweh Himself who has sacrificed His people to their enemies in pursuance of His own design. It is He, and not the gods of Babylon, who is the great Creator, the Ruler of history.

It is He who is the first and the last, the everlasting God, incomparable in wisdom and in strength. And because the prophet believes so much in the God of Israel he is assured of Israel's restoration. It is his inference from the greatness and the mercy of God. It is also true that the tidings had reached him of the early victories achieved by Cyrus; but it was more than political foresight which caused him so confidently to proclaim that Cyrus would overthrow Babylon and deliver Israel. It by no means followed, from the early successes which he achieved, that the world-power of Babylon would succumb to his assault. And yet the prophet has no doubt that Cyrus is the destined deliverer. His faith rises superior to the insuperable objections which might be urged against so improbable an anticipation. His conviction rests partly on his faith in God, partly on his faith in the mission of Israel. That Israel should be called to teach the Gentiles the true religion, and to suffer for the sins of the nations, seemed in strange contrast to the evidence of events. For how should the nations learn from a people so

utterly despised? What opportunity had they for carrying out this world-wide mission? How could a people so discredited in the world's eyes by the fate which had overtaken it win a hearing from the prosperous nations? What likelihood did there seem to be that the power of Babylon should be broken? and, even if broken, could they take it for granted that their new master would restore their national existence?

These are the objections which a statesman, wise with the world's wisdom, a cool observer of events, might have offered. But the prophet's faith does not sink back defeated from a conflict with these difficulties, nor is it infected by the contagion of his people's unbelief. And history has shown how brilliantly his forecast was confirmed in the complete triumph which formed the climax to the career of Cyrus and the permission given to the Jews to return. It is true that the reality fell short of the prophet's expectation, for comparatively few availed themselves of the permission to leave Babylon for the land of their fathers, and the community lived in wretchedness and disillusion for a long period.

Nor did it rise to the demand which the prophet had made upon it, that it should be a missionary nation carrying the true religion to the Gentiles. But the blame for this failure must not be allowed to rest upon the prophet; it was rather the slackness and indifference of the people, their unwillingness to accept the call which might have meant so much to the world.

But there was one writer in the latter period who rose above the national limitations even more successfully than the Second Isaiah himself—this was the author of the Book of Jonah. The great conception of the earlier writer, that Israel's election had not been for itself but for the world, was taken up by the author of this golden book. I have spoken at length elsewhere of the book's significance and of the wonderful power with which the author has expounded and enforced his theme. Here it must suffice simply to call attention to the quality of his faith. The Jews of the post-Exilic period had a very narrow conception of God and His grace. True, they recognised as a dogma of theology His unique divinity, and yet they annulled the theoretical

confession by the practical attitude they took up towards the heathen.

Now it is true that the Second Isaiah himself had not eliminated the idea of favouritism from his doctrine of Israel's election, yet he had clearly taught that, while Israel was God's favourite people, the mission entrusted to it was that of spiritual instruction of the heathen. The author of the Book of Jonah betrays no trace of narrowness, nor does he think of Israel as God's favourite people. In the largeness of his conception of God he is surpassed by none of the Old Testament writers. And even more remarkable is the way in which he regards the heathen. The Jews looked upon them as utterly reprobate, given up not simply to idolatry, but to all manner of foul and revolting vices. And, indeed, there was only too much excuse for their harsh judgment. But mingled with this was a darker strain of feeling, vindictiveness for the wrongs they had suffered at the hands of Gentile oppressors and the diseased patriotism which led them to despise all who stood outside the sacred circle of their own nationality. Any thought of their conversion to



the true religion seemed, to the self-complacent exclusiveness of Judaism, a matter for ridicule.

But already the Second Isaiah had expressed a nobler conviction. Speaking of the Servant of Yahweh, he says, "For his teaching the far lands do wait." He divines in that heathen world a longing and expectancy for the truth which it is Israel's mission to satisfy. And when we turn to the Book of Jonah we observe with what loving care the author has brought out the readiness of the heathen world, of the sailors in the ship, and, far more surprising, of the Ninevites in their blood-stained city, to receive the truth. And these stand out all the more strongly against the pitiful narrowness and bigotry of the prophet, against his thirst for vengeance on the oppressors of his people. When we remember the hardness and narrowness, or the still darker qualities which stamp the later Judaism, we shall feel constrained to recognise how wonderful it was that the author of this book should have risen to such a lonely height. It stands worthily by the side of the highest achievements of inspiration, and the author,



alike for his faith in God, and his still more wonderful faith in his fellow-men, fitly closes the series of great prophets whose names might most appropriately have been mentioned in such a chapter as this.

## CHAPTER XV

### HEROES AND MARTYRS

FROM the persons whom he has just mentioned, the Judges, David, Samuel and the Prophets, the author passes to their achievements, not confining himself to those whom he has mentioned, but embracing in his view the dazzling triumphs and the still more wonderful endurance exhibited by the heroes and martyrs of faith down the history of Israel till the time of the Maccabees. He had no pinched or contracted view of faith; he includes in the range of it some things that we with our more secular habit of thought might be tempted to exclude.

First, there were the great military exploits of Israel's leaders. More than once he touches on this aspect of Hebrew history—"subdued kingdoms," "waxed mighty in war," "turned to

flight armies of aliens." All of these sanctify the calling of the soldier as exhibiting faith, in a way which corresponds to the Old Testament rather than to the New Testament ideal.

Yet with all the imperfection which to ourselves seems to cling about this ideal, we ought not to blame the writer for reversion to a lower type. It would show a lack of historical imagination to expect Old Testament characters to conform to a New Testament standard as yet unrevealed. All we can expect is that they should place their life under the sanction of religion, and since war was to them part of the natural order of things, it provided a fitting field in which their faith might be exercised. We may, of course, feel that there is a difference between wars of conquest and wars in self-defence. But the Hebrews thought that religion justified their conquest of Canaan, and David no doubt imagined that his wars of aggrandisement raised the prestige of Israel's God. But we turn with more sympathy to the efforts made by Israel to shake off the Philistine yoke, or to the splendid and thrilling story of the Maccabean

struggle to save the national religion from extinction.

As a typical example of faith we might take the incident of Jonathan's exploit in the former struggle where he and his armour-bearer attack the Philistine garrison and initiate the great defeat of the oppressor. It is a beautiful example of exalted faith which we find in his word: "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." And an even higher level is reached in the Maccabean wars, where Judas and his brothers again and again faced and conquered overwhelming odds in the firm conviction that God was on their side. They waxed mighty in war, and turned to flight armies of aliens. Beginning in a very tiny uprising against an apparently irresistible tyranny, they truly exemplified the writer's saying that out of weakness they were made strong. Again and again the mighty host of Antiochus Epiphanes went down before the daring onset of the faith-inspired Maccabees, and by their heroism prevented the king's attempt to stamp out their religion. It is probable that in the phrase "wrought righteousness" he also has

in mind not so much what we should understand by the term as the achievement of deeds of heroic daring on the battlefield.

We are on ground more congenial to ourselves in the phrase "obtained promises." For here, although military triumphs may be partly in mind, the thought is by no means limited to these. It is not simply that they received promises, but that they obtained their fulfilment. The making of the promise may be entirely independent in the first instance of the recipient's faith. It is God who takes the initiative in graciously setting before His servants some alluring prospect. But promises are naturally not unconditional, they imply believing response on the part of the recipient, and therefore if the promise is to be realised faith is necessary for its attainment. There is a sentence in Genesis with reference to the faith of Abraham which has left its mark deep upon the New Testament: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." It is true, of course, that lack of faith does not always cancel the fulfilment of the promise itself. The New Testament assures us that

our lack of faith does not make void the faithfulness of God.

To refer once more to an example which has already been quoted, the unbelief of Ahaz does not prevent Isaiah from enshrining in the promise of Immanuel his conviction that the foes of Judah will be overthrown. The unbelief of Zacharias does not prevent the birth of John the Baptist. But in these cases unbelief of the individual would have involved far-reaching consequences to others than themselves. And though in virtue of our solidarity the evil results of our own unbelief affect others as well as ourselves, we can readily see that the wider issues involved may lift the promise into a region beyond the power of an individual's disbelief to cancel it. The exemplification of the general fact that faith obtains the promise are rather too numerous to be mentioned here, and some of them have already come before us in our review of the earlier history. Nor is it necessary to linger on the reference to the faith of Daniel which muzzled the lions, or that of the three Hebrew children which quenched the violence of fire. Nor need I

do more than refer in passing to the faith which triumphed over death in the cases of those women whose sons Elijah and Elisha recalled to life.

From the great conquests of faith the author passes to its even nobler triumphs of endurance. There is far less heroism displayed in exploits of daring valour. Here the flush of excitement, the conviction of success, the consciousness of admiring spectators, nerve the courage for a loftier flight. But in the experience of persecution the romantic and exhilarating supports of heroism are withdrawn. The hero can no longer feel the intoxication of conflict or "drink delight of battle with his peers." He has first to wait, and then to endure. And the torture of suspense is itself enough to make the strong quail in the agony of apprehension, especially when it is long drawn out, when everything is uncertain—the time, the manner, the intensity of the torment, when the mind has no fixed point of contemplation on which to rest. It is then that the battle may be almost lost before it is even joined. The tormentor well knows the horrors of suspense,

and carefully calculates to break his victim's spirit before ever his body is brought into the torture-chamber. And when suspense and fearful apprehension have done their worst, when the courage is sapped and the imagination has played freely on the ghastly future, then physical torture is enlisted to complete the fiendish work which imagination has begun. Through it all the victim is quite helpless and passive; he can do nothing, he can only suffer.

The instances of torture which the author brings before us largely belong to the Maccabean struggle. Special prominence is given to the narrative of the seven brethren and their mother, which we read in the Second Book of the Maccabees. Where nothing can help the sentence of execution from being carried into effect, there is no temptation to purchase relief from intolerable pain by surrender of conviction. But in this case, as the writer reminds us, they might have accepted their deliverance; recantation of their religion would have won them release from their agonies. But animated by their faith in God, which was a conviction of the Unseen,



and rested on the hope of a better resurrection, they braved the worst that their enemies could do to them, and illustrated a principle which has received many another illustration in the history of martyrdom, that the patience of the persecutor is more quickly tired than that of his victim. It is an experience like this which tests to the uttermost the quality of faith.

Some of the trials which he enumerates are less harrowing and strain faith much less. To be stoned or slain with the sword, that is a short agony ; but the long, slow death, or the still longer torture which does not mercifully end in death, that is more terrible both to contemplate and to endure. To wander about in sheepskins and goatskins, to be homeless and poverty-stricken, to be fugitives in hiding from the fury of the oppressor, that also is a bitter hardship and may wear down the faith. But these things are not to be placed in comparison with acute physical torture inflicted with the explicit purpose of wringing the maximum of pain from the helpless victim.

In our own soft and sentimental age, an age of vivid imagination, of nerves, anæsthetics,

and cowardly shrinking from physical pain, the stories of the torture-chamber touch us with amazement if we are able to enter with sympathy into all the cruel misery they involved. We cannot help the reflection, if the old time of persecution were to come back, though in the more terrible form which the ingenuity of modern science on the one hand and the profounder knowledge of the human body on the other would make possible, how would the Churches of the present day meet the crisis? It can hardly be doubted that the first effect would be to sift the Churches to a faithful remnant, though it is not to be questioned that reserves of courage would be found in some where we should least expect it. But we should have at least this assurance, that the power of faith in which they triumphed would remain our chief hope; the firm hold on spiritual realities would be our surest safeguard against defeat of the spirit on the physical battlefield.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THEY RECEIVED NOT THE PROMISE

So far we have followed the author through his great delineation of the triumphs achieved by faith. The stream of eloquence which at first moved leisurely, lingering on one eminent example of faith after another, has gathered volume and speed in its course till it rushes along in a rapid torrent of impassioned rhetoric. And now we are ready for the climax. We have heard of those of whom the world was not worthy, who passed through such bitter trials with unfaltering faith and achieved such heights of heroism ; now we are prepared to hear that they have won the crown. After the disappointments and the postponement of earth, heaven, we say to ourselves, has made up for it all. The faith through which they received their good report has at last gained for them also a substantial reward.

But this is precisely what we do not find. This is not what the author has to tell us, but rather they "received not the promise." How chilling the sentence seems! What an anti-climax! We have followed the author in his glowing tribute to their character and achievements; we agree with him that they have had witness borne to them by their faith. They have enlisted our sympathies, and already in our minds we have decreed to them the prize. And just when we are expecting what is to us merely a formal announcement, so sure are we what the verdict is to be, we find ourselves quite mistaken. We read, "They received not the promise," the flat contradiction of what we had anticipated. And the author will leave no loophole for exceptional cases. Not Enoch, though he had escaped from death; not Noah, though he and his household alone were accounted worthy of rescue from the flood; not Abraham, who abandoned everything to follow the divine impulse blindfold, and who did not shrink from giving his son to death, though this seemed to destroy the possibility that the promise should be realised; not Moses, who

renounced all that Egypt had to offer, and then made the still harder sacrifice of renouncing that for which his first renunciation has been made; nor yet any of the heroes who laughed at impossibilities, or the martyrs who braved the uttermost pain, are exempt from the sweep of this chilling utterance, "they received not the promise."

No matter how pre-eminent their faith, even when they had passed within the veil the reward was withheld from them. And at first we are inclined to be resentful. Surely, we say, they have entered into their rest, their warfare is over, their time of hard service has come to an end. Earth is the fit sphere for faith. Here in a material universe we need a power of that kind to pass beyond the insistent barriers of sense and lay firm hold on the unseen. But when we no longer bind our spirits to the unseen world by the anchor cast within the veil, but have passed through the veil itself, then it seems as if faith had no further function. By faith we come to the brink of the river, and even through the river it is faith which has still to uphold us. It is no mantle of Elijah which smites the waters

of Jordan this way and that, so that dry-shod the believer may pass over it. Yet though we have not only to live in faith but to die in faith, it is our natural impulse to suppose that once the physical garment has been stripped from the spirit, faith has become obsolete and realisation has taken its place.

But the significance of this passage lies just in this, that it contradicts our natural expectation. Death for the worthies, on whose triumphs he has so proudly dwelt, did not mean that they received the fulfilment of the promise. And lest any one should object that the words "they received not the promise" simply meant that they did not receive the promise in this life, and therefore from beginning to end their earthly career had to be one of faith, I would point out that this limitation is excluded by the closing words of the chapter, which mean that, even as the author writes, they are still waiting for the promise to be bestowed.

And perhaps this ought not to move us with such a sense of strangeness. It is so like what we have met hitherto that just at the very point when it seems as if the promise

is to be realised its fulfilment should be indefinitely postponed. The explorer toils up the mountain-side and bids his bruised, exhausted body hold out a few yards more and the summit will be reached, only to find when he gains it an unguessed range before him piercing the clouds. And when we are taken into the unseen world, and the clouds receive us from the gaze of those whose eyes are strained to catch the last glimpse of us, we too may find that there is still room for faith, that the consummation is as yet unreachd.

It may, however, be urged that we ought not to complain if faith not only received no reward at death, but if it never received any reward at all. There are those who ask us indignantly, Is not virtue its own reward? Ought we to want anything beyond the satisfaction that we have done our duty and spent our lives for the good of our fellows? There is unquestionably a note of nobility about so disinterested an attitude which appeals to us very strongly. I think, however, that the idea is overstrained. We feel the spell of it in some moods very much more than in others. There are theoretical altruists who

would criticise the maxim that we should love our neighbour as ourselves on the ground that we ought to love him better than ourselves. To my mind, sanity and balance are altogether on the other side. We must be fairly ignorant both of ourselves and of other people if we do not realise that the Gospel maxim is likely to remain for the majority of us an unfulfilled ideal.

The armchair moralist raises objections which a closer attention to practical conditions would quickly teach him to regard as irrelevant. The Gospel does not leave self-regarding motives altogether out of account. But that is not the whole consideration for us to bear in mind. It is a "promise" of which the author is speaking, and this involves the Author of the promise. The question of fulfilment touches God even more than it touches those to whom He has made it. Probably many of my readers are familiar with the story of the old woman who, when, after a life of conspicuous piety, she was challenged with the question, "Suppose God were after all to fling you into hell?" made the reply which has not unfitly been called



sublime, "He would lose more than I should."

That answer implies our deepest reason for a faith in immortality. Just because it is God who makes the promise, it cannot remain permanently unfulfilled. It is His faithfulness which is at stake, and this is the guarantee on which the soul may ultimately rest. We may well ask what kind of a God He would be who gave us such grounds for confidence, and buoyed us up all the time with hopes which He meant never to fulfil, cheating us with false expectations, or warning us from evil with false alarms? Or what kind of a God could He be who assured us of His love and revealed Himself as our Father who should stretch out no hand to save us from being submerged by death? The belief in God and the belief in immortality have been closely associated in history, because they are intimately connected in thought. A bare faith in God cannot be a vital faith in God. We have not passed beyond the realm of speculation when we have reached the intellectual conviction that God exists.

To rise from the realm of speculation into

that of religion, we must not simply accept the existence of God, but believe that He enters into relation with us. As the author has put it, faith not only believes that God is, but that He is a rewarder of those who seek after Him. The pale and cheerless theism which is the outcome of the intellect's effort to grasp the ground of being and explain the origin and development of the universe needs to be transfigured by the radiant experience of personal fellowship, which puts a new depth and richness of meaning into what would otherwise be just a speculative idea. Thus it is God Himself who is the guarantee that the promise will ultimately be realised.

## CHAPTER XVII

### FAITH WITHIN THE VEIL

IN the last chapter I pointed out that the author confronts us with the surprising statement that death did not mean for the ancient exemplars of faith the attainment of the promise. On the contrary, even when death severed the spirit from the body, the promise still remained unrealised. I closed with the thought that the inheritance could not permanently be withheld, that nothing less than God's own character was at stake in securing its ultimate fulfilment. But, as I have already pointed out, we may be educated by hopes which have an element of illusion in them. God may present the hope to us in a form suitable to our immature modes of thought. He graciously takes us where He finds us, and presents motives to us, not because He

regards them as the highest and the best, but because they are best fitted to our imperfection.

We have seen examples in this chapter of faith directed to a lower goal, but subsequently dissatisfied with it and seeking a higher. And since this was the experience of these worthies in this life, ought we to be surprised when the author tells us that even at death they did not receive the promise? When we reflect upon it, it seems to fall in line with what we have already observed. For we have seen that the reward of faith's victory is often that it should be exposed to a conflict severer still, that the moment of anticipated realisation should be the moment of keen disappointment. Now, of all such moments, it is just the beginning of life after death which might seem the fittest for the reward to be given. For not only do the very conditions of our earthly life require faith to be a permanent experience, but all the earthly stages remain on a continuous plane. But when the spirit leaves the body, the personality enters on something new and strange, and that critical point of transition

might seem the best suited for faith to receive its crown.

But the very fact that this seems so natural to us should make us hesitate. It has happened so often that the moment when anticipation seemed about to be realised has been the moment of its disappointing postponement that we ought, perhaps, to expect the same law to operate on the other side. And we can see a reason why it should be so. The keener the disappointment the severer the strain upon faith. And there can be no reason in the nature of things why we should imagine that death leaves no longer any room for faith. The shock of bewilderment provides just the conditions under which faith is submitted to the hardest test.

The glimpses within the veil which are permitted to us are so slight and brief that they provide us with the slenderest basis for any coherent theory of the after-life. We may well believe that the reticence is intentional. What is tantalising to our curiosity should be joyfully accepted by our faith. "He that believeth shall not make haste." Faith is patient and hankers after no premature know-

ledge. It is content as it walks through the mists if it can see but one step in advance.

Yet where hints have been granted us we are not forbidden to make use of them. And the hint which this passage affords us that the Old Testament saints were still long after their death exercising faith, that their aspirations still reached forward to the fulfilment of the promise, is most suggestive. It is too common a thought that in the next world perfection is achieved at a bound, the loftiest level attainable is reached at once, and on it eternity is spent.

We need to substitute the dynamic for the static conception. This condition of stagnant bliss without movement or development becomes less attractive as we think of it. It is the perpetual movement onward and upward that fascinates and entrances us, the sense that still more is to be won, that vision expands and capacity unfolds, that in Christ there are unsearchable riches which eternity will not suffice to exhaust. As we open our eyes in the new world it will be perhaps but very little that we apprehend. Much knowledge will have to be

gained, many dark secrets to be slowly explored, and faith will still be exercised in the presence of vast and vague mysteries. Constituted as we are, it is the searching even more than the knowledge we win by it which satisfies us. The figure under which we think of the water of life is a river whose characteristic is movement and progress, rather than the lake self-contained and complete; the Lamb leads His followers from fountain to fountain of living water.

And this thought of faith as still finding scope after death is suggestive to us in another way. It helps to enhance our sense of what God has in store for us. The nearer the boon the less it is likely to be, while that which lies in the remote future to which such prolonged preparation is destined to lead is likely to be some wholly unimaginable good. The author uses the vague phrase "some better thing" just because he feels that it cannot be set forth in adequate words. Since our training to receive it is spread over a period so long, we may well believe that when it is at last achieved it will seem to us far worthier and grander than any

of the poor notions we have been able to form.

The point on which the author dwells, however, in this connexion is that we should not be anticipated in the consummation by those who have had an accidental priority to us. The saints of the Old Covenant had long ago passed from earth, and we might say, in our ordinary phrase, they had gone to their reward. But that is not how the author puts it; they are still kept waiting because the promise cannot be realised till the saints of the New Covenant can share it with them. We must, of course, remember that when the author wrote it was anticipated by the early Church that Christ might at any moment return and the consummation of history be complete. The problem therefore presented itself to the writer in a somewhat different form than, after nearly two millenniums of the Church's history, it presents itself to us. What underlies the statement is partly perhaps that there is no partiality with God. He will not suffer the accident of later birth to involve a later participation in the promise.

The same principle is applied by Paul in the



reverse direction. He tells the Thessalonians that they will by no means anticipate the fellow members of their community who have fallen asleep. It is not, however, this principle of impartiality alone, but the thought that apart from Christ the highest good cannot be attained. But, applying his principles to our very different conditions, we might infer from them indefinite progress towards a destiny which lies far beyond our present imagination. It is a long stairway that we have to mount, and at the top there is

That one far-off divine event  
To which the whole creation moves.

On this note our meditation may fitly close. We have seen how great a part faith had to play in the life of those who lived under the Old Covenant, and even before it. For us it is most necessary to remember that even under the Gospel faith remains a vital necessity. We have still to base our lives on a conviction of the unseen realities, and live as those who behold the Invisible. We have to keep our spirits from the risk of being submerged by the things of sense, and remember that in the

world we are strangers and pilgrims. Thus we may move undaunted on our way, confronting without dread the perils which are about us till this earthly stage of our upward journey be over, and we pass within the veil, still in the power of faith to pursue what new adventure may be appointed for us.





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